

Official Report of the
One Hundred Seventy-fourth
Semiannual General

CONFERENCE

of The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints

held in the Conference Center
Salt Lake City, Utah

October 2 and 3, 2004

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Report of the 174th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The 174th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Saturday, October 2, 2004, at 10:00 a.m.

The general sessions of the conference were held at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, October 2 and 3, 2004. The general priesthood session was held on Saturday, October 2, at 6:00 p.m.

President Gordon B. Hinckley presided at all sessions of the conference. He conducted the priesthood and the Sunday morning sessions. President Thomas S. Monson conducted the Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, and Sunday afternoon sessions.

The conference was carried by satellite transmission to thousands of Church buildings in many countries. In areas that did not receive this transmission, videotapes of the conference were sent to local distribution centers and made available to all Church units. In addition, television and radio stations and the LDS Radio Network carried portions or all of the general sessions to large audiences throughout North America. The proceedings were also broadcast live over the Internet.

General Authorities

First Presidency: Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson, and James E. Faust

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland, Henry B. Eyring, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, and David A. Bednar

Presidency of the Seventy: Earl C. Tingey, D. Todd Christofferson, David

E. Sorensen, Charles Didier, Merrill J. Bateman, John H. Groberg, and Robert C. Oaks

First Quorum of the Seventy: Carlos H. Amado, Neil L. Andersen, Monte J. Brough, Sheldon F. Child, L. Whitney Clayton, Gary J. Coleman, Spencer J. Condie, Gene R. Cook, Quentin L. Cook, Claudio R. M. Costa, Robert K. Dellenbach, John B. Dickson, Christoffel Golden Jr., Walter F. González, Bruce C. Hafen, Donald L. Hallstrom, F. Melvin Hammond, Harold G. Hillam, F. Burton Howard, Jay E. Jensen, Marlin K. Jensen, Kenneth Johnson, W. Rolfe Kerr, Yoshihiko Kikuchi, John M. Madsen, Richard J. Maynes, Lynn A. Mickelsen, Dennis B. Neuenschwander, Glenn L. Pace, Bruce D. Porter, Carl B. Pratt, Ronald A. Rasband, Lynn G. Robbins, Cecil O. Samuelson Jr., Steven E. Snow, Francisco J. Viñas, Lance B. Wickman, and W. Craig Zwick

Second Quorum of the Seventy: Mervyn B. Arnold, Douglas L. Callister, Craig C. Christensen, Shirley D. Christensen, Darwin B. Christenson, Adhemar Damiani, James M. Dunn, Daryl H. Garn, D. Rex Gerratt, H. Aldridge Gillespie, Ronald T. Halverson, Keith K. Hilbig, Spencer V. Jones, Gerald N. Lund, Clate W. Mask Jr., Dale E. Miller, Robert F. Orton, Stephen B. Oveson, William W. Parmley, Wayne S. Peterson, H. Bryan Richards, Ned B. Roueché, R. Conrad Schultz, W. Douglas Shumway, Dennis E. Simmons, Donald L. Staheli, Robert R. Steuer, David R. Stone, H. Bruce Stucki, William R. Walker, Robert J. Whetten, Richard H. Winkel, Robert S. Wood, and H. Ross Workman

Presiding Bishopric: H. David Burton, Richard C. Edgley, and Keith B. McMullin

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 174th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 2, 2004. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and John Longhurst and Clay Christiansen were the organists. To begin this session, the choir sang “Rejoice, the Lord Is King!” President Monson then made the following remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you to this, the first general session of the 174th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We acknowledge the General Authorities seated on the stand in the Conference Center and at the overflow locations in the Tabernacle and the Assembly Hall. We likewise acknowledge the Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Sunday School, and Primary general presidencies in attendance at this session.

We extend a special welcome to government, education, and civic leaders who are present with us.

We are grateful to the owners and operators of the many television and radio stations and satellite and cable systems for offering their facilities as a public service to bring this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world. We’re also pleased to make available these proceedings via the Internet at lds.org.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with John Longhurst and Clay Christiansen at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing “Rejoice, the Lord Is King!” and will now favor us with “The Morning Breaks.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Keith Crockett of the Seventy.

The choir sang “The Morning Breaks.”

Elder Keith Crockett offered the invocation.

President Monson

It will now be our privilege to hear from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Two new members of the Twelve

As we open this great conference, we note the absence of Elders David B. Haight and Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Each of them served long and very effectively. We mourn their passing. We greatly miss them. We extend our love to their dear ones. We are confident that they are carrying on this great work on the other side of the veil.

We recognize that in the natural course of events there are recurring vacancies which make necessary filling these as they are created. After fasting and prayer, we have called Elder Dieter Friedrich Uchtdorf and Elder David Allan Bednar to fill these vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We present their names to you this morning. You may not know them, but you will soon get acquainted

with them. Those of you who feel you can sustain them in this sacred calling will please signify by the uplifted hand. Any who may be opposed?

Their names will be included in the sustaining of all of the authorities later in the conference. Now we ask these Brethren to take their places on the stand with members of the Twelve. They will speak to us Sunday morning, and you will get to know them better.

Church continues to grow, to bless lives

Now in opening the conference I wish to comment briefly on the condition of the Church. It continues to grow. It is touching the lives of more and more people every year. It is spreading far and wide over the earth.

The building of temples and meetinghouses

To accommodate this growth we must, of necessity, continue to build houses of worship. We now have, at some stage, 451 meetinghouses of various sizes under construction in many parts of the earth. This tremendous building program is phenomenal. I know of nothing to equal it. Our structures are beautiful. They add to the ambience of any community in which they stand. They are well maintained. We have had long experience in constructing houses of worship, and out of that vast experience we are producing better buildings than have ever previously been constructed in the Church. They combine beauty with great utility. If they look much the same, it is because that is intended. By following tried and tested patterns we save millions of dollars while meeting the needs of our people.

We continue to build temples. We recently broke ground for a new temple in Sacramento, California, the seventh in that state, where we have the second largest membership of any state in the United States.

The temples in the Salt Lake City area are extremely busy and at times are overloaded. For this reason, we have determined to build a new temple in the Salt Lake Valley. The location of the site will be announced shortly. It may appear that we are unduly favoring this area. But temple attendance is such that we must accommodate those who wish to come. And if the present growth trends continue, we shall probably need yet another.

We are also pleased to announce that we will construct another temple in Idaho, where we have the third largest membership in the United States. Plans are going forward for one in Rexburg. Now we are also planning to build another in the city of Twin Falls. This temple will serve thousands of our members who live between Idaho Falls and Boise.

Temples are now under construction in Aba, Nigeria; Helsinki, Finland; Newport Beach and Sacramento, California; and San Antonio, Texas. We are replacing the temple which was destroyed by fire in Samoa.

When those which have thus far been announced are dedicated, we shall have 130 working temples. Others will be constructed as the Church continues to grow.

Construction on and around Temple Square

We are now working on a major undertaking in Salt Lake City. It is imperative that we preserve the environment around Temple Square. This makes necessary a very large construction project. Tithing funds will not be used for this construction. The income from Church businesses, rents on the property, and other such sources make this possible.

We must do extensive work on the Salt Lake Tabernacle to make it seismically safe. This marvelous structure has been used for 137 years this month. The time has come when we must do something to preserve it. It is one of the unique

architectural masterpieces in the entire world and a building of immense historical interest. Its historical qualities will be carefully preserved, while its utility, comfort, and safety will be increased. We are grateful that we have this Conference Center, where we can meet for such gatherings as this. I now ask myself, "What would we do without it?"

Educational and missionary programs

I am pleased to report that the Perpetual Education Fund continues to grow, as does the number of those who are the beneficiaries of this wonderful undertaking.

We are strengthening our missionary program. We are striving to bring a greater measure of spirituality into the work of our vast body of missionaries.

Our educational program continues to grow, extending its influence wherever the Church is established.

New publication of the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon was recently included as one of the 20 most influential books ever published in America. We are now joining hands with a commercial publisher to enlarge the distribution of this sacred volume, this second witness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Greater faith and vitality than ever before

And so, brothers and sisters, I might continue. Suffice it to say that I believe the Church is in better condition than it has

been at any time in its entire history. I have been around now for nearly 95 years of that history, and I have seen much of it firsthand. I am satisfied that there is greater faith, there is a broader measure of service, and there is a more general measure of integrity among our youth. There is greater vitality in all aspects of the work than we have ever seen before. Let us glory in this wonderful season of the work of the Lord. Let us not be proud or arrogant. Let us be humbly grateful. And let us, each one, resolve within himself or herself that we will add to the luster of this magnificent work of the Almighty, that it may shine across the earth as a beacon of strength and goodness for all the world to look upon, is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Each Life That Touches Ours for Good."

President Monson

The choir just sang "Each Life That Touches Ours for Good."

We shall now hear from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, after which we shall hear from Elder John H. Groberg of the Presidency of the Seventy. The choir and congregation will then sing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet."

Following the singing, we shall hear from Elder Dale E. Miller of the Seventy. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will then address us.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

An affection stronger than death

On behalf of my Brethren in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, may I be the first to welcome Elders Dieter Uchtdorf

and David Bednar to their new callings and the sweet association that lies ahead of them. When the original Twelve were called in this dispensation, they were told

that their appointment was “calculated to create for you an affection for each other, stronger than death.”¹ We already have such affection for you, brethren, for your wives, and for your families. We say with one heart and one voice, “Welcome, dear friends.”

In the spirit of President Hinckley’s tender remarks, may I also express that same “affection . . . stronger than death” and the deep personal loss felt by all of us in the passing of our beloved David B. Haight and Neal A. Maxwell. To those two brethren and their sweet Ruby and Colleen, respectively, we say that we love you, we reverence your service, and we honor the exemplary lives you have lived. Each of us considers it the greatest of privileges to know you and to have served at your side. You are precious to us forever.

A foundation of apostles and prophets

In light of such significant transitions in the rolling forth of this work, I wish to say something this morning of the apostleship and the importance of its perpetuation in the true Church of Jesus Christ. In so doing I speak not of the men who hold that office but rather of the office itself, a calling in the holy Melchizedek Priesthood which the Savior Himself has designated for the watch care of His people and the witnessing of His name.

In order to establish a church that would continue under His direction even after He was taken from the earth, Jesus “went . . . into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.”²

Later on, Paul would teach that the Savior, knowing the inevitability of His death, had done this to give the Church a “foundation of . . . apostles and prophets.”³ These brethren and the other offi-

cers of the Church would serve under the direction of the resurrected Christ.

Why? Among other reasons, so “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”⁴

Thus the apostolic and prophetic foundation of the Church was to bless in all times, but *especially* in times of adversity or danger, times when we might feel like children, confused or disoriented, perhaps a little fearful, times in which the devious hand of men or the maliciousness of the devil would attempt to unsettle or mislead. Against such times as come in our modern day, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve are commissioned by God and sustained by you as prophets, seers, and revelators, with the President of the Church sustained as *the* prophet, seer, and revelator, the *senior* Apostle, and as such the only man authorized to exercise all of the revelatory and administrative keys for the Church.

In New Testament times, in Book of Mormon times, and in modern times these officers form the foundation stones of the true Church, positioned around and gaining their strength from the chief cornerstone, “the rock of our Redeemer, who is [Jesus] Christ, the Son of God,”⁵ He who is the great “Apostle and High Priest of our profession,” to use Paul’s phrase.⁶ Such a foundation in Christ was and is always to be a protection in days “when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you.” In such days as we are now in—and will more or less always be in—the storms of life “shall have no power over you . . . because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.”⁷

Recognizing the need for Apostles

Three weeks ago I was at a stake conference in the lovely little mountain community of Prescott, Arizona. Following the delightful events of that weekend, a sister silently slipped me a note as she and others came by to shake hands and say good-bye. With some hesitation I share a portion of it with you this morning. Please focus on the doctrine this sister teaches, not the participants in the exchange.

“Dear Elder Holland, thank you for the testimony you bore in this conference of the Savior and His love. Forty-one years ago I prayed earnestly to the Lord and told Him I wished I had lived on earth when the Apostles walked upon it, when there had been a true Church, and when Christ’s voice was still heard. Within a year of that prayer, Heavenly Father sent two LDS missionaries to me, and I found that all those hopes could be realized. Perhaps some hour when you are tired or troubled, this note will help you remember why hearing your voice and shaking your hand is so important to me and to millions just like me. Your sister in love and gratitude, Gloria Clements.”

Well, Sister Clements, your very tender note recalled for me a similar hope and almost the same language once used in my own family. In the tumultuous years of the first settlements in this nation, Roger Williams, my volatile and determined 10th great-grandfather, fled—not entirely of his own volition—from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and settled in what is now the state of Rhode Island. He called his headquarters Providence, the very name itself revealing his lifelong quest for divine interventions and heavenly manifestations. But he never found what he felt was the true New Testament church of earlier times. Of this disappointed seeker the legendary Cotton Mather said, “Mr. Williams [finally] told [his followers] ‘that being himself misled, he had [misled them,] and’ he was now satisfied that there was none upon

earth that could administer baptism [or any of the ordinances of the gospel], . . . [so] he advised them therefore to *forego* all . . . and wait for the coming of *new* apostles.”⁸ Roger Williams did not live to see those longed-for new Apostles raised up, but in a future time I hope to be able to tell him personally that his posterity did live to see such.

Recognizing the need for revelation

Anxiety and expectation regarding the need for divine direction were not uncommon among those religious reformers who set the stage for the restoration of the gospel. One of the most famous of the New England preachers, Jonathan Edwards, said, “It seems to me a[n] . . . unreasonable thing, to suppose that there should be a God . . . that has so much concern [for us], . . . and yet that he should never speak, . . . that there should be no word [from him].”⁹

Later the incomparable Ralph Waldo Emerson rocked the very foundations of New England ecclesiastical orthodoxy when he said to the Divinity School at Harvard:

“It is my duty to say to you that the need was never greater [for] new revelation than now.” “The doctrine of inspiration is lost. . . . Miracles, prophecy, . . . the holy life, exist as ancient history [only]. . . . Men have come to speak of . . . revelation as somewhat long ago given and done, as if God were dead. . . . It is the office of a true teacher,” he warned, “to show us that God is, not was; that He speaketh, not spake.”¹⁰

In essence, Mr. Emerson was saying, “If you persist in handing out stones when people ask for bread, they will eventually stop coming to the bakery.”¹¹

The principle of present revelation

Consider these stunning indictments from the towering figures of American history, to say nothing of the prayers of a

Gloria Clements, and it highlights in bold relief the powerful message of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, especially to those of you who meet our missionaries. Prophets? Seers? Revelators? The events of 1820 and 1830, and the events of nearly two centuries that have followed, declare that revelations and those who receive them are not “long ago given and done.”

In the very year Mr. Emerson gave his Divinity School address implicitly pleading for such, Elder John Taylor, a young English immigrant to this country, was called to be an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, a prophet, a seer, a revelator. In that calling Elder Taylor once said in sympathy with honest seekers of truth:

“Whoever heard of true religion without communication with God? To me the thing is the most absurd that the human mind could conceive of. I do not wonder,” said Brother Taylor, “[that] when the people generally reject the principle of present revelation, . . . skepticism and infidelity prevail to such an alarming extent. I do not wonder,” he continued, “that so many men treat religion with contempt, and regard it as something not worth the attention of intelligent beings, for without revelation religion is a mockery and a farce. . . . *The principle of present revelation . . . is the very foundation of our religion.*”¹²

Joseph Smith’s legacy of revelation

The principle of present revelation? The very foundation of our religion? Let me return from those foundations to the present, the here and now, the 21st century. For one and all—ecclesiastics, historians, and laymen alike—the issue is still the same. Are the heavens open? Does God reveal His will to prophets and apostles as in days of old? That they are and that He does is the unflinching declaration of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to all the world. And in that declaration lies the significance of Joseph

Smith, the Prophet, for nearly 200 years now.

His life asked and answered the question “Do you believe God speaks to man?” In all else that he accomplished in his brief 38½ years, Joseph left us above all else the resolute legacy of divine revelation—not a single, isolated revelation without evidence or consequence, and not “a mild sort of inspiration seeping into the minds of all good people” everywhere, but specific, documented, ongoing directions from God. As a good friend and faithful LDS scholar has succinctly put it:

“At a time when the origins of Christianity were under assault by the forces of Enlightenment rationality, Joseph Smith [unequivocally and singlehandedly] returned modern Christianity to its origins in revelation.”¹³

Expression of gratitude and testimony

We do “thank thee, O God, for a prophet to guide us in these latter days,”¹⁴ because many of those days will be wind-blown and tempest-tossed. We give thanks for that morning in the spring of 1820 when the Father and the Son appeared in glory to a 14-year-old boy. We give thanks for that morning when Peter, James, and John came to restore the keys of the holy priesthood and all the offices in it. And in our generation we give thanks for the morning of September 30, 1961, 43 years ago this weekend, when (then) Elder Gordon B. Hinckley was called to the apostleship, the 75th man in this dispensation to be so named. And so it goes down to a day such as this, and so it will go continually until the Savior comes.

In a world of unrest and fear, political turmoil and moral drift, I testify that Jesus is the Christ—that He is the living Bread and living Water—still, yet, and always the great Shield of safety in our lives, the mighty Stone of Israel, the Anchor of this, His living Church. I testify of His prophets, seers, and revelators, who constitute

the ongoing foundation of that Church, and bear witness that such offices and such oracles are at work now, under the guidance of the Savior of us all, in and for our very needful day. Of these truths and of the divinity of this work I bear witness. Of them I *am* a witness, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *History of the Church*, 2:197.
2. Luke 6:12–13.
3. See Ephesians 2:19–20.
4. Ephesians 4:14.
5. Helaman 5:12.
6. Hebrews 3:1.
7. Helaman 5:12.
8. *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1853), 2:498.

9. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 18, *The “Miscellanies” 501–832*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (2000), 89–90.
10. *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (1940), 75, 71, 80.
11. Louis Cassels, quoted in Howard W. Hunter, “Spiritual Famine,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1973, 64.
12. “Discourse by John Taylor,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 4, 1874, 68; italics added.
13. See Richard L. Bushman’s essay “A Joseph Smith for the Twenty-first Century” in *Believing History* (2004). These citations are from page 274, but the essay should be read in its entirety.
14. “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” *Hymns*, no. 19.

Elder John H. Groberg

The power of God’s love

What is it about true love that touches every heart? Why does the simple phrase “I love you” evoke such universal joy?

Men give various reasons, but the real reason is that every person who comes to earth is a spirit son or daughter of God. Since all love emanates from God, we are born with the capacity and the desire to love and to be loved. One of the strongest connections we have with our premortal life is how much our Father and Jesus loved us and how much we loved Them. Even though a veil was drawn over our memory, whenever we sense true love, it awakens a longing that cannot be denied.

Responding to true love is part of our very being. We innately desire to reconnect here with the love we felt there. Only as we feel God’s love and fill our hearts with His love can we be truly happy.

God’s love fills the immensity of space; therefore, there is no shortage of love in the universe, only in our willingness to do what is needed to feel it. To do this, Jesus

explained we must “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, . . . soul, . . . strength, and . . . mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27).

Obedience helps us find lasting love

The more we obey God, the more we desire to help others. The more we help others, the more we love God, and on and on. Conversely, the more we disobey God and the more selfish we are, the less love we feel.

Trying to find lasting love without obeying God is like trying to quench thirst by drinking from an empty cup—you can go through the motions, but the thirst remains. Similarly, trying to find love without helping and sacrificing for others is like trying to live without eating—it is against the laws of nature and cannot succeed. We cannot fake love. It must become part of us. The prophet Mormon explained:

“Charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found

possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love” (Moroni 7:47–48).

Feeling God’s love in times of adversity

God is anxious to help us feel His love wherever we are. Let me give an example.

A devastating hurricane

As a young missionary I was assigned to a small island of about 700 inhabitants in a remote area of the South Pacific. To me the heat was oppressive, the mosquitoes were terrible, the mud was everywhere, the language was impossible, and the food was—well, “different.”

After a few months our island was struck by a powerful hurricane. The devastation was massive. Crops were ruined, lives were lost, housing was blown away, and the telegraph station—our only link to the outside world—was destroyed. A small government boat normally came every month or two, so we rationed our food to last four or five weeks, hoping the boat would come. But no boat came. Every day we became weaker. There were acts of great kindness, but as the sixth and seventh weeks passed with very little food, our strength slipped noticeably. My native companion, Feki, helped me in every way he could, but as the eighth week commenced, I had no energy. I just sat under the shade of a tree and prayed and read scriptures and spent hours and hours pondering the things of eternity.

Feeling the depth of God’s love

The ninth week began with little outward change. However, there was a great inward change. I felt the Lord’s love more deeply than ever before and learned firsthand that His love “is the most desirable

above all things . . . yea, and the most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11:22–23).

I was pretty much skin and bones by now. I remember watching, with deep reverence, my heart beating, my lungs breathing, and thinking what a marvelous body God has created to house our equally marvelous spirit! The thought of a permanent union of these two elements, made possible through the Savior’s love, atoning sacrifice, and Resurrection, was so inspiring and satisfying that any physical discomfort faded into oblivion.

When we understand who God is, who we are, how He loves us, and what His plan is for us, fear evaporates. When we get the tiniest glimpse of these truths, our concern over worldly things vanishes. To think we actually fall for Satan’s lies that power, fame, or wealth is important is truly laughable—or would be were it not so sad.

I learned that just as rockets must overcome the pull of gravity to roar into space, so we must overcome the pull of the world to soar into the eternal realms of understanding and love. I realized my mortal life might end there, but there was no panic. I knew life would continue, and whether here or there didn’t really matter. What did matter was how much love I had in my heart. I knew I needed more! I knew that our joy now and forever is inextricably tied to our capacity to love.

Being transformed by God’s love

As these thoughts filled and lifted my soul, I gradually became aware of some excited voices. My companion Feki’s eyes were dancing as he said, “Kolipoki, a boat has arrived, and it is full of food. We are saved! Aren’t you excited?” I wasn’t sure, but since the boat had come, that must be God’s answer, so yes, I was happy. Feki gave me some food and said, “Here, eat.” I hesitated. I looked at the food. I looked at Feki. I looked into the sky and closed my eyes.

I felt something very deep. I was grateful my life here would go on as before; still, there was a wistful feeling—a subtle sense of postponement, as when darkness closes the brilliant colors of a perfect sunset and you realize you must wait for another evening to again enjoy such beauty.

I wasn't sure I wanted to open my eyes, but when I did I realized that God's love had changed everything. The heat, the mud, the mosquitoes, the people, the language, the food were no longer challenges. Those who had tried to harm me were no longer my enemies. Everyone was my brother or sister. Being filled with God's love is the most joyous of all things and is worth every cost.

The sacrament reminds us of God's love

I thanked God for this choice time and for the many reminders of His love—the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the birth of a child, the smile of a friend. I thanked Him for scriptures, for the privilege of prayer, and for that most marvelous reminder of His love—the sacrament.

I learned that as we sing the sacrament hymns with real intent, phrases like “How great the wisdom and the love” or “Dearly, dearly has he loved! And we must love him too” will swell our hearts with love and gratitude (“How Great the Wisdom and the Love,” *Hymns*, no. 195; “There Is a Green Hill Far Away,” *Hymns*, no. 194). As we sincerely listen to the sacrament prayers, phrases such as “always remember him,” “keep his commandments,” “have his Spirit to be with them” will fill our hearts with an overwhelming desire to be better (see D&C 20:77, 79). Then when we partake of the bread and the water with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, I know we can feel and even hear those most wonderful words “I love you. I love you.”

I thought I would never forget these feelings, but the pull of the world is strong and we tend to slip. But God continues to love us.

Power of true love knows no barriers

Several months after I regained my strength, we were caught in another violent storm, only this time at sea. The waves became so big they flipped our small boat over, throwing the three of us into the raging, churning ocean. When I found myself in the middle of a tumultuous sea, I was surprised, scared, and a little upset. “Why has this happened?” I thought. “I’m a missionary. Where is my protection? Missionaries aren’t supposed to swim.”

But swim I must if I wished to stay alive. Every time I complained, I found myself underwater, so it didn’t take long to quit complaining. Things are how they are, and complaining doesn’t help. I needed every ounce of energy to keep my head above water and make it to shore. Having earned my Eagle Scout Award, I was a pretty confident swimmer, but over time the wind and the waves began to sap my strength. I never quit trying, but there came a time when my muscles simply would move no more.

I had a prayer in my heart, but still I began to sink. As I was going down for what could have been the last time, the Lord infused into my mind and heart a deep feeling of love for a very special person. It was as though I could see and hear her. Even though she was 8,000 miles away, the power of that love came rushing across those miles and, penetrating time and space, reached down and pulled me up—lifted me from the depths of darkness, despair, and death and brought me up to light and life and hope. With a sudden burst of energy I made it to shore, where I found my shipmates. Never underestimate the power of true love, for it knows no barriers.

When filled with God’s love, we can do and see and understand things that we could not otherwise do or see or understand. Filled with His love, we can endure pain, quell fear, forgive freely, avoid con-

tention, renew strength, and bless and help others in ways surprising even to us.

Partake of the Savior's unlimited love

Jesus Christ was filled with unfathomable love as He endured incomprehensible pain, cruelty, and injustice for us. Through His love for us, He rose above otherwise insurmountable barriers. His love knows no barriers. He invites us to follow Him and partake of His unlimited love so we too may rise above the pain and cruelty and injustice of this world and help and forgive and bless.

I know He lives. I know He loves us. I know we can feel His love here and now. I know His voice is one of perfect mildness

which penetrates to our very center. I know He smiles and is filled with compassion and love. I know He is full of gentleness, kindness, mercy, and desire to help. I love Him with all my heart. I testify that when we are ready, His pure love instantly moves across time and space, reaches down, and pulls us up from the depths of any tumultuous sea of darkness, sin, sorrow, death, or despair we may find ourselves in and brings us into the light and life and love of eternity. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir and congregation sang "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet."

Elder Dale E. Miller

True conversion brings peace, healing

Here at Church headquarters we hold many committee meetings, and early this year in one of those meetings, Elder Neal A. Maxwell was listening attentively to a presentation concerning the development of local leaders. Near the end of the meeting, Elder Maxwell asked, "Is there more that we can do to help bishops bring peace and healing to the Saints?" I was interested in knowing more of his concern, so just prior to his passing and in the privacy of his office, Elder Maxwell expanded on the doctrines associated with obtaining peace and healing. He gave encouragement to my sharing these remarks with Church members.

Elder Maxwell was and remains a wonderful example of selfless love. His concerns for others were bone deep, especially for those with physical and emotional pains. Walking out of his office, one could not help but be more committed to being Christlike. He set a standard for us all. He loved the Savior. He was indeed a true Apostle and disciple. We miss him.

He gave wonderful insights on how total peace and healing come only through full conversion of the soul. He commented on having learned years earlier from President Marion G. Romney concerning the steps to a complete conversion. He quoted from a 1963 general conference talk in which President Romney quoted the Savior's words to Peter: "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). President Romney commented:

"It would appear that membership in the Church and conversion are not necessarily synonymous. Being converted, as we are here using the term, and having a testimony are not necessarily the same thing either. A testimony comes when the Holy Ghost gives the earnest seeker a witness of the truth. A moving testimony vitalizes faith; that is, it induces repentance and obedience to the commandments. Conversion, on the other hand, is the fruit of, or the reward for, repentance and obedience" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1963, 24; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1963, 1066).

Examples of true conversion

Conversion does not normally come all at once, even though the scriptures give us dramatic accounts. It comes in stages, until a person becomes at heart a new person. Being “born again” is the scriptural term. It is a change of both how we think and how we feel (see Conference Report, Oct. 1963, 23–24).

Conversion of Enos

In the Book of Mormon we read of Enos, whose soul hungered to know more of his father’s teachings concerning eternal life. After a day and night of continuous prayer, he had a voice come to him that said, “Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed.” Enos writes, “I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away” (Enos 1:5–6).

Conversion of Alma the Younger

We have the account of the prophet Alma the Younger recounting his conversion experience to his son Helaman. He told of coming to a dramatic realization of his past sins and mistakes, confessing his rebellion against his God. He then remembered his father, Alma, foretelling of the coming of one Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus would come to atone for the sins of the world. I quote:

“Now, as my *mind* caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my *heart*: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.”

Alma experienced eternal pain and guilt but realized that an escape was made possible through the Atonement. Alma continues:

“And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more;

yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

“And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!” (see Alma 36:12–20; italics added).

Alma found his soul healed through the knowledge that Jesus would come and take away all his sins. As his soul became healed, he found peace within himself. Alma was so captured by the effects of this conversion experience that he repeated the sensations to Helaman:

“Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and *again I say unto you, my son*, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (Alma 36:21; italics added).

He was teaching a pattern to his son of lasting peace and joy, just as Enos’s father had done. There is a pattern here of fathers teaching children about the Atonement and eternal life. It is a pattern for all fathers in our day.

What these accounts teach about conversion

Several instructive points come to mind about Alma’s conversion:

1. Like Enos, he had a vivid awareness and remorse for past sins that had offended God.

2. Like Enos, he remembered his father’s teachings—the promise of atonement for sin, through Jesus Christ.

3. Like Enos, he personally pleaded in supplication for his soul.

4. Like Enos, he experienced the miracle of the Atonement to the degree that he could neither remember the pains from his sins nor feel guilt. The healing of his soul was complete. It was a cleansing experience both to the mind and the heart. Joy replaced bitterness. He became a new man, born again of the Spirit. And like

Enos, he immediately turned his attention to serving the Lord and his fellow beings.

Conversion and covenants

Will the Lord do for us what He did for Enos and Alma?

C. S. Lewis put it this way: “[God] has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. He does not have to deal with us in the mass. You are as much alone with Him as if you were the only being He had ever created. When Christ died, He died for you individually just as much as if you had been the only man [or woman] in the world” (*Mere Christianity* [1943], 131).

Are there scriptural accounts of this conversion working among the Saints? We have a number of examples. The account of the Saints in King Benjamin’s time will illustrate. We read the response of the Saints after listening to their king and prophet teach of the commandments and of the Atonement of Jesus Christ:

“And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we *believe all the words* which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we *know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts,* that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. . . .

“*And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days*” (Mosiah 5:2, 5; italics added).

You will notice their words are very similar to the commitments you make in the baptismal covenant (see D&C 20:37).

The blessings and promises of conversion are received by covenant through baptism and confirmation and all the ordinances of the temple and the priesthood. Then by continued repentance and obedience and faithful keeping of the covenants made, the fruits of conversion grow and develop in one’s life. As conversion matures and is sustained through the work-

ings of the Holy Ghost, peace and healing come to the soul.

How to recognize true conversion

Somebody once asked President Romney how one could know when he is converted. President Romney answered:

“He may be assured of it when by the power of the Holy Spirit his soul is healed. When this occurs, he will recognize it by the way he feels, for he will feel as the people of Benjamin felt when they received remission of sins. The record says, ‘. . . the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience. . . .’ (Mosiah 4:3.)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1963, 25).

Peter describes what happens in a full conversion: We become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4; see also verses 1–3, 5–9).

It is through this total conversion experience that we truly come to personally know and feel the character and greatness of God. It is the means whereby we become not only servants of the Lord but His friends as well. To the Saints of the early restoration period, the Lord defined His relationship with them: “And again I say unto you, my friends, for from henceforth I shall call you friends” (D&C 84:77).

Coming to know God is part of conversion

In last October’s general conference, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught us and gave us his feelings regarding the grandeur and character of God (see Conference Report, Oct. 2003, 73–75; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 70–73). He spoke of the eternal importance of knowing God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. He quoted the familiar verse from the Savior’s intercessory prayer: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

He also quoted the not-so-familiar statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God." "I want you all to know Him, and to be familiar with Him" (*History of the Church*, 6:305).

Knowing God and becoming His friend comes with the conversion process. Enos found it. King Benjamin's subjects found it. Alma found it. It is available to all who will repent and obey the commandments. This conversion is an intimate and intensely personal experience. It is about relationships. It involves awakening the Spirit of Christ, which is in all men and women (see D&C 84:45–46; 88:11). It involves awakening within us the feelings of the Holy Ghost, leading us to a testimony of truth. It involves receiving the Holy Ghost after accepting the covenant of baptism. The gift of the Holy Ghost guides us and comforts us in our discipleship, bringing us near to the Savior. The Savior,

in turn, is our Advocate with the Father, and through our faithfulness He will bring us to the Father to become joint heirs with Him (see John 14:6; Romans 8:17; D&C 45:3–5).

Prophets lead to peace and healing

We have a rich treasure of marvelous teachings and thoughts left to us by the holy prophets. They are truly God's messengers leading His children to salvation and eternal life.

Their testimonies serve to strengthen our faith. Please listen to their words and testimonies. They will help to lead you toward peace and healing to your soul.

It is my personal witness that the Spirit of the Lord is real and unmistakable. I testify that the Father and the Son are knowable and love you. I feel that love through the power of the Spirit. Of these truths I testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Richard G. Scott

Peace of conscience and peace of mind

In these times of increasing uncertainty there is so much heartache, anguish, and suffering throughout the world that could be avoided by understanding and applying truth. For many, relief and happiness can come by understanding the relationship between peace of conscience and peace of mind and by living the principles upon which both of these blessings are founded.

God wants each of His children to enjoy the transcendent blessing of peace of conscience.¹ A tranquil conscience invites freedom from anguish, sorrow, guilt, shame, and self-condemnation. It provides a foundation for happiness. It is a condition of immense worth, yet there are few on earth that enjoy it. Why? Most often

because the principles upon which peace of conscience is founded are either not understood or not adequately followed. My life has been so richly endowed from peace of conscience that I would share insights on how it can be obtained.

Peace of conscience is the essential ingredient to your peace of mind. Without peace of conscience, you can have no real peace of mind. Peace of conscience relates to your inner self and is controlled by what you personally do. Peace of conscience can come only from God through a righteous, obedient life. It cannot exist otherwise.

On the other hand, peace of mind is most often affected by external forces such as concern for a wayward child, economic pressures, real or imagined offenses, deteriorating world conditions, or more to do

than sufficient time to do it. An unsettled mind is temporary, transitory.

Peace of mind is restored by resolving the external forces that disturb it. Not so with a troubled conscience, for it is unrelenting, ever present, a constant reminder of the need to correct your past mistakes, to resolve an offense to another, or to repent of transgression. Oh, a disturbed conscience can be temporarily masked by physical stimulation of the mind and body where one yields to the temptations of alcohol, drugs, pornography, and worse—all this at the cost of an increased appetite for false efforts to calm an aching conscience, with the risk of incurring unrelenting addictions. There is a better way to restore peace of conscience.

The ability to have an unsettled conscience is a gift of God to help you succeed in this mortal life. It results principally from the influence of the Light of Christ on your mind and heart. The Light of Christ is that divine power or influence that emanates from God through Jesus Christ.² It gives light and life to all things. It prompts all rational individuals throughout the earth to distinguish truth from error, right from wrong. It activates your conscience.³ Its influence can be weakened through transgression and addiction and restored through proper repentance. The Light of Christ is not a person. It is a power and influence that comes from God and, when followed, can lead a person to qualify for the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.⁴

It is well to remember that even with peace of conscience you can have temporary periods when your peace of mind is interrupted by external concerns. Your understanding of the causes can relieve much of the pressure they generate. As your personal life conforms to the teachings of the Lord, you can seek His help in resolving the troubling issues. Thus your faith in the Lord and in His teachings will yield peace of mind. Your efforts will be

stepping-stones to greater personal growth as Spirit-guided solutions are found. In addition, as they are resolved, such challenges can often bring blessings to others when their needs have caused the disturbed feelings in your mind.

In summary, you can regain peace of conscience by repenting of personal transgressions that cause you internal turmoil. Then peace of mind can be secured by resolving the external pressures that cause you temporary anxiety, worry, and distress. Yet try as you might, you will not find enduring happiness until, through repentance, you satisfy personally broken law to restore peace to a troubled conscience.

Principles for finding peace of conscience

Whether you are one who recognizes a need to repent and are finding it difficult to do so or one who wonders if you have repented enough to be fully forgiven, it may be helpful to review some fundamental principles upon which peace of conscience is founded.

Repent of sins

Broken law from sin or transgression causes anguish of mind and heart from an offended conscience. Knowing that all of His spirit children save His Only Begotten, Jesus Christ, would unintentionally or intentionally violate His laws, our Eternal Father provided a means to correct the consequences of such acts. Whether the violation be great or small, the solution is the same: full repentance through faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement with obedience to His commandments.

When needed, full repentance will require action on your part. If you are not familiar with the classic steps to repentance, such as *confession and abandonment of sin, restitution, obedience, and seeking forgiveness*, talk to a bishop or study a source such as President Spencer W. Kim-

ball's masterly work *The Miracle of Forgiveness*.

Forgive others

In addition to fulfilling those requirements, the return of your peace of conscience will be hastened by giving careful attention to another step that is sometimes not recognized. The Savior has made it clear that to receive forgiveness you must forgive others their offenses against you.

"I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.

"And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds."⁵

"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

"But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."⁶

If as an innocent victim you have been seriously wronged, don't harbor feelings of hatred, anger at what appears to be unjust. Forgive the offender even when you are innocent. To do that may require an enormous effort on your part. Such forgiveness is most difficult, but it is the sure path to peace and healing. If there is discipline required for a serious transgression against you, leave that to the Church and civil authorities. Don't burden your own life with thoughts of retribution. The Lord's mill of justice grinds slowly, but it grinds exceedingly well. In the Lord's economy, no one will escape the consequences of unresolved violation of His laws. In His time and in His way, full payment will be required for unrepented evil acts.

Seek forgiveness through Jesus Christ

I testify that of all the necessary steps to repentance, the most critically important is for you to have a conviction that

forgiveness comes in and through Jesus Christ. It is essential to know that only on His terms can you be forgiven. You will be helped as you exercise faith in Christ.⁷ That means you trust Him and His teachings. Satan would have you believe that serious transgression cannot be entirely overcome. I testify that the Savior gave His life so that through repentance the effects of all sin can be put behind you, save the shedding of innocent blood and the denial of the Holy Ghost.⁸

The fruit of true repentance is God's forgiveness, which opens the door to receive all of the covenants and ordinances provided on this earth and to enjoy the resulting blessings. When repentance is full and one has been cleansed, there comes a new vision of life and its glorious possibilities. How marvelous the promise of the Lord: "Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more."⁹ The Lord is and ever will be faithful to His words.

A suggested way to come back

If you have a troubled conscience from broken laws, I plead, please come back. Come back to the cool, refreshing waters of personal purity. Come back to the warmth and security of Father in Heaven's love. Come back to the serenity and peace of conscience that come from living the commandments of God.

May I suggest a way back? You can begin alone and proceed at your own pace. I invite you to carefully study the Book of Mormon. There are many scriptures that show how others have overcome barriers to repentance. For example, Alma speaks to Shiblon:

"I was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul; and never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But . . . I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul.

“And now, my son, I have told you this that ye may learn wisdom, that ye may learn . . . that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ. Behold, he is the life and the light of the world.”¹⁰

From this scripture you can see that suffering does not bring forgiveness. That comes through faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His teachings so that His gift of redemption can work its miracle. He invites:

“Behold, I have come . . . to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin.

“Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive . . . ; therefore repent, and come unto me . . . and be saved.”¹¹

Apply what the Book of Mormon teaches you. Ponder the verses that speak of the Savior. Seek prayerfully to know Him. Ask your Father in Heaven to strengthen your faith in His Son and give you the power to obey His commandments. When ready, seek the aid of a caring bishop to help you complete the process of repentance. Then you can have peace of conscience and the assurance that the Lord has forgiven you.

Please come back. Don’t wait until all is in perfect order. We will walk beside you. We love you. Please come back.

Forgive yourself after repenting of sins

Now if you are one who cannot forgive yourself for serious past transgressions—even when a judge in Israel has assured that you have properly repented—if you feel compelled to continually condemn yourself and suffer by frequently recalling the details of past errors, I plead with all of my soul that you ponder this statement of the Savior:

“He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.

“By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins . . . , he will confess them and forsake them.”¹²

To continue to suffer when there has been proper repentance is not prompted by the Savior but the master of deceit, whose goal is to bind and enslave you. Satan will press you to continue to relive the details of past mistakes, knowing that such thoughts make forgiveness seem unattainable. In this way Satan attempts to tie strings to the mind and body so that he can manipulate you like a puppet.

I testify that when a bishop or stake president has confirmed that your repentance is sufficient, know that your obedience has allowed the Atonement of Jesus Christ to satisfy the demands of justice for the laws you have broken. Therefore, you are now free. Please believe it. To continually suffer the distressing effects of sin after adequate repentance, while not intended, is to deny the efficacy of the Savior’s Atonement in your behalf.

When memory of prior mistakes encroached upon Ammon’s mind, he turned his thoughts to Jesus Christ and the miracle of forgiveness. Then his suffering was replaced with joy, gratitude, and thanksgiving for the Savior’s love and forgiveness.¹³ Please, go and do likewise. Do it now so that you can enjoy peace of conscience and peace of mind with all their attendant blessings. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Mosiah 4:2–3.
2. See Topical Guide, “Light of Christ,” 290.
3. See Moroni 7:16.
4. See John 1:9; Doctrine and Covenants 84:46–47.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 64:10–11.
6. Mark 11:25–26.
7. See 2 Nephi 9:22–24; Alma 11:40.
8. Unpardonable: see Hebrews 6:4–8; Alma 39:6; Doctrine and Covenants 76:31–38; 132:27. Unforgivable: see Doctrine and Covenants 42:18.

9. Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
10. Alma 38:8–9.
11. 3 Nephi 9:21–22.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 58:42–43.
13. See Alma 26:17–20.

The choir sang “Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel.”

President Monson

The choir has just sung “Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel.”

We are grateful to the Tabernacle Choir for the beautiful music they have provided this morning. President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our concluding speaker at this session.

Following President Faust’s remarks, the choir will sing “Come, Let Us Anew.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder D. Rex Gerratt of the Seventy, and conference will be adjourned until 2:00 this afternoon.

President James E. Faust

My dear brothers and sisters and friends, President Hinckley has reminded us that the “golden years” are filled with more lead than gold! That is why I am sitting down as I speak to you today. I am recovering from a slipped disk, which caused a pinched nerve in my back. I have been told that in time I can expect a full recovery.

I express my profound appreciation for the blessings that have come to the world through the magnificent service of our departed Brethren, Elders Neal A. Maxwell and David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Our loss is great. We welcome Brother Uchtdorf and Brother Bednar, men of strength and faith, into the sweet councils of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

A message of hope for those who suffer

I humbly pray this morning that I may be understood and not misunderstood. In an increasingly unjust world, to survive and even to find happiness and joy, no matter what comes, we must make our stand unequivocally with the Lord. We need to try to be faithful every hour of every day so

that our foundation of trust in the Lord will never be shaken. My message is one of hope and counsel for those who may wonder about the seemingly unfair distribution of pain, suffering, disaster, and heartache in this life. Some may ask:

“Why was I born with physical or mental limitations?”

“What did I do to deserve this heartache?”

“Why did my father have to suffer so much following a cruel, disabling stroke? He was such a righteous man and was always faithful and true to the Lord and His Church.”

“Why did I have to lose my mother twice—once to the ravages of Alzheimer’s disease and, secondly, to death? She was such an angel.”

“Why did the Lord let our little baby girl die? She was so precious, and we loved her so much.”

“Why hasn’t the Lord answered our prayers the way we wished?”

“Life isn’t fair. We know some people who have done some very bad things, and yet they seem to have everything they want or need.”

Why do the good suffer?

Dr. Arthur Wentworth Hewitt suggested some reasons why the good suffer as well as the wicked:

“First: I don’t know. Second: We may not be as innocent as we think. Third: . . . I believe it is because He loves *us* so much more than He loves our happiness. How so? Well, if on a basis of strict personal return here and now, all the good were always happy and all the bad suffered disaster (instead of often quite the reverse), this would be the most subtle damnation of character imaginable.”¹

President Kimball gave this insightful explanation:

“If pain and sorrow and total punishment immediately followed the doing of evil, no soul would repeat a misdeed. If joy and peace and rewards were instantaneously given the doer of good, there could be no evil—all would do good and not because of the rightness of doing good. There would be no test of strength, no development of character, no growth of powers, no free agency. . . . There would also be an absence of joy, success, resurrection, eternal life, and godhood.”²

Our love of God must be pure, without selfish intent. The pure love of Christ must be the motive in our devotion.

Keep an eternal perspective

Now all this suffering might indeed be unfair if everything ended at death, but it doesn’t. Life is not like a one-act play. It has three acts. We had a past act, when we were in the premortal existence; and now we have a present act, which is mortality; and we will have a future act, when we return to God.³ As Jesus promised, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”⁴ We were sent into mortality to be tested and tried. As the Lord explained to Abraham, “We will prove them herewith, to see if

they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.”⁵

Our past and present sufferings cannot, as Paul said, “be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”⁶ in the eternities. “For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory.”⁷ So tribulation is useful in the sense that it is helpful to get into the celestial kingdom.

Opposite responses to adversity

Some, because they lack faith or understanding of the eternal plan, become bitter and lose hope. One such was a 19th-century writer who achieved both success and wealth with his dazzling wit and writing style. His wife came from a religious family, and he wanted to have faith in God but wasn’t really sure God existed. Then he was hit by a series of crushing blows. In 1893 a national financial crisis left him deeply in debt. His oldest daughter died while he was on a speaking tour. His wife’s health failed, and she died in 1904. His youngest daughter died in 1909. His own health declined. His writing, which had formerly been so full of sparkle, now reflected his bitterness. He became progressively depressed, cynical, and disillusioned and remained so until his death in 1910. With all his brilliance, he lacked the inner strength to deal with adversity and simply resigned himself to his misfortunes.

It’s not so much what happens to us but how we deal with what happens to us. That reminds me of a passage from *Alma*. After a long war, “many had become hardened,” while “many were softened because of their afflictions.”⁸ The same circumstances produced opposite responses. The writer who lost so much was not able to draw from the well of faith. Each of us needs to have our own storehouse of faith

to help us rise above the troubles that are part of this mortal probation.

Faith sustains Thomas Giles in adversity

Thomas Giles, a Welsh convert who joined the Church in 1844, also suffered much in his lifetime. He was a miner, and while he was digging coal in the mine, a large piece of coal hit him on the head and inflicted a wound nine inches long. The doctor who examined him said the injured man would not live longer than 24 hours. But then the elders came and administered to him. He was promised that he would get well, and that “even if he would never see again, he would live to do much good in the Church.” Brother Giles did indeed live but was blind the rest of his life. Within a month of his injury, “he was out traveling through the country attending to his ecclesiastical duties.”

In 1856 Brother Giles and his family immigrated to Utah, but before he left his homeland, the Welsh Saints presented him with a harp, which he learned to play skillfully. At Council Bluffs he joined a handcart company and headed west. “Though blind he pulled a handcart from Council Bluffs to Salt Lake City.” While crossing the plains his wife and two children died. “His sorrow was great and his heart almost broken, but his faith did not fail him. In the midst of his grief he said as did one of old, ‘The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’”⁹ When Brother Giles arrived in Salt Lake City, President Brigham Young, who had heard his story, loaned Brother Giles a valuable harp until his own arrived from Wales. Brother Giles “traveled from settlement to settlement in Utah, . . . gladdening the hearts of the people with his sweet music.”¹⁰

We must make our stand with the Lord

How we use our God-given moral agency explains why some things happen

in our lives. Some of our choices have unforeseen results, which may be good or bad. But often we know in advance that some of our choices will have detrimental or even harmful consequences. I call these “informed choices” because we know our acts will have disastrous results. These informed choices include illicit sexual relations and the use of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. Such poorly informed choices may prevent a person from going on a mission or receiving temple blessings. We may make incorrect informed decisions because the lures of the world distort reality and make us vulnerable. In dating relationships with the opposite sex, making a wrong choice early may limit making the right choice later.

So where should each of us make our stand? As we demonstrate our devotion to God by our daily acts of righteousness, He can know where we stand. For all of us this life is a time of sifting and refining. We all face trials. Individual members in the early days of the Church were tested and refined when they had to decide if they had the faith, like Brother Giles, to put their belongings in a wagon or a pioneer handcart and travel across the American plains. Some did not have the faith. Those who did traveled “with faith in every footstep.” In our time we are going through an increasingly difficult time of refining and testing. The tests are more subtle because the lines between good and evil are being eroded. Very little seems to be sacred in any of our public communication. In this environment we will need to make sure where we stand all of the time in our commitment to eternal truths and covenants.

Job’s faithfulness in adversity

We learn much about dealing with suffering from “a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.”¹¹ Satan obtained leave from the Lord to tempt and try Job.

Job was rich and had seven sons and three daughters, but his property and children were all destroyed. What effect did this have on Job? Said he, speaking of the Lord, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,”¹² and, “He also shall be my salvation.”¹³ Job attested, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”¹⁴ Job completely trusted the Lord to take care of all of the other concerns.

The way to find joy in this life is to resolve, like Job, to endure all for God and His work. By so doing we will receive the infinite, priceless joy of being with our Savior in the eternities. As we sing in one of our well-known hymns:

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for
repose
I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should
endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!¹⁵

We do not know the wisdom of the Lord

President Howard W. Hunter once said, “God knows what we do not know and sees what we do not see.”¹⁶ None of us knows the wisdom of the Lord. We do not know in advance exactly how He would get us from where we are to where we need to be, but He does offer us broad outlines in our patriarchal blessings. We encounter many bumps, bends, and forks in the road of life that leads to the eternities. There is so much teaching and correction as we travel on that road. Said the Lord, “He that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom.”¹⁷ “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”¹⁸

As we live on earth, we must walk in faith, nothing doubting. When the journey becomes seemingly unbearable, we can take comfort in the words of the Lord: “I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy

tears: behold, I will heal thee.”¹⁹ Some of the healing may take place in another world. We may never know why some things happen in this life. The reason for some of our suffering is known only to the Lord.

Trials can help prepare us for exaltation

President Brigham Young offered the profound insight that at least some of our suffering has a purpose when he said:

“All intelligent beings who are crowned with crowns of glory, immortality, and eternal lives must pass through every ordeal appointed for intelligent beings to pass through, to gain their glory and exaltation. Every calamity that can come upon mortal beings will be suffered to come upon the few, to prepare them to enjoy the presence of the Lord. . . . Every trial and experience you have passed through is necessary for your salvation.”²⁰

We have much reason to hope. Joy can be ours if we are willing to sacrifice all for the Lord. Then we can look forward to the infinitely priceless possibility of overcoming all the challenges of this life. Then we will be with the Savior forever and, as President Brigham Young also said, “anticipate enjoying the glory, excellency and exaltation which God has prepared for the faithful.”²¹

God lives, Jesus is the Christ, President Gordon B. Hinckley is our prophet, and this is a time for all of us to prepare to meet God. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Excerpt from a letter.
2. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 77.
3. See Ecclesiastes 12:7.
4. John 14:2.
5. Abraham 3:25.
6. Romans 8:18.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 58:4.
8. Alma 62:41.
9. See Job 1:21.

10. See Andrew Jensen, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (1901–36), 2:507–8.
11. Job 1:1.
12. Job 13:15.
13. Job 13:16.
14. Job 19:25–26.
15. “How Firm a Foundation,” *Hymns*, no. 85.
16. In Conference Report, Oct. 1987, 71; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 60.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 136:31.
18. Hebrews 12:6.
19. 2 Kings 20:5.
20. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 345.
21. “Remarks,” *Deseret News*, May 31, 1871, 197.

The choir sang “Come, Let Us Anew.” Elder D. Rex Gerratt offered the benediction.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The second session of the 174th Semi-annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 2, 2004. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

A Primary choir from stakes in West Jordan, Utah, provided the music. Jane Knudsen Poulsen directed the choir, and Linda Margetts was the organist.

President Monson made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this afternoon to the second general session of the 174th Semi-annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings to all who are in attendance or who are participating by means of television, cable, radio, or the Internet and to the many who are watching in stake centers in various parts of the world where the conference is being carried by satellite transmission.

The music for this session will be by a Primary choir from stakes in West Jordan, Utah, under the direction of Jane Knudsen Poulsen, with Linda Margetts at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing “Beautiful Savior.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Stephen A. West of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Beautiful Savior.” Elder Stephen A. West offered the invocation.

President Monson

Thank you, Elder West.

The choir will now sing a medley of Primary songs. Aren’t these children beautiful? They sing too.

Following the singing, the General Authorities, Area Authority Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies of the Church will be presented for your sustaining vote.

At the conclusion of the sustaining, it will be our pleasure to hear from Elders L. Tom Perry and Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Following their remarks, we will hear from Elder Ned B. Roueché of the Seventy.

The choir sang a medley of “Jesus Once Was a Little Child,” “I Think When I Read That Sweet Story,” and “I Feel My Savior’s Love.”

The Sustaining of Church Officers

President Thomas S. Monson

My brothers and sisters, President Hinckley has requested that I now present to you the General Authorities, Area Authority Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies of the Church for your sustaining vote.

It is proposed that we sustain Gordon Bitner Hinckley as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Thomas Spencer Monson as First Counselor in the First Presidency; and James Esdras Faust as Second Counselor in the First Presidency. Those in favor may manifest it. Those opposed, if any, may manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain Thomas Spencer Monson as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Boyd Kenneth Packer as Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; and the following as members of that quorum: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland, Henry B. Eyring, Dieter Friedrich Uchtdorf, and David Allan Bednar. Those in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the counselors in the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. All in favor, please manifest it. Contrary, if there be any, by the same sign.

In view of his call to the Quorum of the Twelve, it is proposed that we release Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf as a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy and as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. All who wish to join with us in doing so, please manifest it.

With gratitude for their service as members of the Second Quorum of the Seventy, we extend an honorable release to Elders E. Ray Bateman, Val R. Christensen, Keith Crockett, Merrill C. Oaks, Gordon T. Watts, and Stephen A. West. All who wish to join with us in doing so, please manifest it. Thank you.

We also extend a release to the following as Area Authority Seventies and express thanks for their diligent service: Juan A. Alvaradejo, Julio E. Alvarado, Modesto M. Amistad Jr., Horacio P. Araya, David A. Bednar, Robert K. Bills, Harold C. Brown, V. Francisco Chinchay, Armando Gaona, Eduardo A. Lamartine, Gary S. Matsuda, Julio E. Otay, Carlos L. Pedraja, Jorge A. Pedrero, João R. C. Martins Silva, Irajá B. Soárez, Héctor M. Verdugo, Jorge F. Zeballos. Those who wish to join in an expression of appreciation, please indicate by the uplifted hand.

It is proposed that we sustain Elder Robert C. Oaks as a member of the Presidency of the Quorums of the Seventy. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain Andrew M. Ford as an Area Authority Seventy. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the other General Authorities, Area Authority Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies as presently constituted. Those in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed may manifest it.

It appears that the sustaining has been unanimous in the affirmative. Thank you, brothers and sisters, for your faith and prayers.

Elder L. Tom Perry

The pattern of Church organization

“Being inspired of the Holy Ghost to lay the foundation thereof, and to build it up unto the most holy faith.

“Which church was organized and established in the year of your Lord eighteen hundred and thirty, in the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month which is called April” (D&C 21:2–3).

It was on this day that Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and members of the Smith and Whitmer families met in the home of Peter Whitmer Sr. in Fayette, Seneca County, New York. After appropriate song and prayers, the revelations concerning the organization of the Church were read to the assembled people. These revelations set forth the order of the priesthood and the duties of the officers in the Church. Following this pattern, the Church organization of today has been built.

“According to previous commandment, the Prophet Joseph called upon the brethren present to know if they would accept himself and Oliver Cowdery as their teachers in the things of the kingdom of God; and if they were willing that they should proceed to organize the church according to the commandment of the Lord. To this they consented by unanimous vote” (B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:196).

And thus we have the pattern established in the very beginning. “And all things shall be done by common consent in the church, by much prayer and faith, for all things you shall receive by faith” (D&C 26:2).

Sustaining new members of the Twelve

I find a special feeling surging through my whole being as I see the hands raised to the square to sustain the leadership of this Church. Today two new members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were sustained by the members of the Church

here in the Conference Center and also by those participating through television, Internet, and satellite in almost all corners of the earth.

Elder Uchtdorf and Elder Bednar, you have been sustained to fill the vacancies created by the deaths of Elder David B. Haight and Elder Neal A. Maxwell. As a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, I welcome you with open arms as you become part of this sacred calling which is ours.

Of course, today we miss our association with Elder Haight and Elder Maxwell. Elder Haight has been sitting by my side in these conferences for the past 28 years. Elder Maxwell has been next to him for a number of years. How I wish I had the enthusiastic spirit of Elder Haight or the word power of Elder Maxwell to express my feelings about this long association I have experienced with these two great brethren. They have added so much to my life. How I miss their continued association!

Sacrifices of early members of the Twelve

We have a rich tradition of the work of the Twelve as we have traveled throughout the world proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. For example, it was on Sunday, June 4, 1837, that the Prophet Joseph Smith approached Heber C. Kimball in the Kirtland Temple and whispered to him, saying, “Brother Heber, the Spirit of the Lord has whispered to me: ‘Let my servant Heber go to England and proclaim my Gospel, and open the door of salvation to that nation’” (quoted in Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* [1945], 104).

The account of Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young leaving their homes for England certainly shows the sacrifice they were willing to make for the callings they had received. The account reads:

“September 14th, [1839], President Brigham Young left his home at Montrose to start on the mission to England. He was so sick that he was unable to go to the Mississippi [River], a distance of thirty rods, without assistance. After he had crossed the river he rode behind Israel Barlow on his horse to my house, where he continued sick until the 18th. He left his wife sick with a babe only three weeks old, and all his other children were sick and unable to wait upon each other. Not one soul of them was able to go to the well for a pail of water, and they were without a second suit to their backs, for the mob in Missouri had taken nearly all he had. On the 17th, Sister Mary Ann Young got a boy to carry her up in his wagon to my house, that she might nurse and comfort Brother Brigham” (quoted in *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 265).

Heber C. Kimball’s family were also ill. Charles Hubbard sent his boy with a team and wagon to help them on their way. Elder Kimball records:

“It appeared to me as though my very inmost parts would melt within me at leaving my family in such a condition, as it were almost in the arms of death. I felt as though I could not endure it. I asked the teamster to stop, and said to Brother Brigham, ‘This is pretty tough, isn’t it; let’s rise up and give them a cheer.’ We arose, and swinging our hats three times over our heads, shouted: ‘Hurrah, hurrah for Israel.’” Sister Young and Sister Kimball came to the door and waved a farewell which gave Brother Brigham and Brother Heber much comfort as they continued “without purse or scrip” toward England. (See *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 265–66.)

Special witnesses of Jesus Christ

The Bible Dictionary states that *Apostle* “means ‘one sent forth.’ . . . The calling of an apostle is to be a special witness of the name of Jesus Christ in all the world, particularly of his divinity and of his bod-

ily resurrection from the dead. . . . Twelve men with this high calling constitute an administrative council in the work of the ministry. . . . Today twelve men with this same divine calling and ordination constitute the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (“Apostle,” 612).

An Apostle today continues to be “one sent forth.” The conditions we face are different from those of the early Brethren as we make our journeys to fulfill our assignment. Our manner of travel to all corners of the earth is very different from that of the early Brethren. However, our assignment remains the same as that which was given by the Savior as He instructed His called Twelve to “go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19–20).

Great blessing of belonging to a quorum

For you two new Brethren, I can promise you that there will be a new understanding of what it means to belong to a quorum. I wish the feeling and respect we have for our council could be transported to every quorum in the Church. Would you deacons, teachers, priests, elders, and high priests quorums listen for a moment to what I believe is one of the greatest blessings one can receive from being a bearer of the priesthood? That special blessing is belonging to a priesthood quorum.

President Stephen L. Richards, many years ago, gave us some wonderful counsel on Church government. His statement is as follows:

“The genius of our Church government is government through *councils*. . . . I see the wisdom, God’s wisdom, in creating councils: to govern his Kingdom. In the

spirit under which we labor, men can get together with seemingly divergent views and far different backgrounds, and under the operation of that spirit, by counseling together, they can arrive at an accord. . . . I have no hesitancy in giving you the assurance, if you will confer in council as you are expected to do, God will give you solutions to the problems that confront you” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1953, 86).

A quorum is a class

And what are the great benefits you will experience from belonging to a quorum? Again from Stephen L. Richards—he said, “A quorum is three things: first, a class; second, a fraternity; and third, a service unit” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1938, 118).

I see this genius so manifestly apparent in the functions of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We are a class as we study the doctrines of the kingdom together. Can you imagine what a special experience it would be to be in a quorum meeting and be taught gospel doctrine by Elders Ezra Taft Benson, Mark E. Petersen, LeGrand Richards, Howard W. Hunter, Bruce R. McConkie, David B. Haight, or Neal A. Maxwell? You will notice that I have used only those Brethren who have completed their earthly ministries in order not to be selective among our current Apostles. This same blessing can be yours in each of your quorums. The words of the Apostles, past and present, live in the scriptures, conference addresses, Church magazines, devotionals, and so forth. They are available to bring the power of the doctrine of the kingdom into your quorum’s class. Make of your quorum a class to increase your knowledge of the gospel of our Lord and Savior.

A quorum is a great brotherhood

In our quorum we have a special brotherhood. We are there to lift, inspire,

and bless each other with the spirit of our calling. When one is burdened, there are 11 others anxious to help lift and share that burden. At times we rejoice together in feelings of accomplishment. We weep together in times of sorrow. We never feel as if we are facing a problem alone! There is always the counsel, support, help, and encouragement of our quorum members.

From the book *Priesthood and Church Government*, we have this statement on the brotherhood which should exist in every priesthood quorum:

“The Priesthood is a great brotherhood, held together by the eternal and immutable laws that constitute the framework of the Gospel. The feeling of brotherhood should permeate the quorum. It should be the first concern of a quorum to help all members who may be in need temporally, mentally, or spiritually. The spirit of brotherhood should be the directing force in all the plans and operations of the quorum. If this spirit be cultivated, wisely and persistently, no other organization will become more attractive to the man who holds the Priesthood” (Rudger Clawson, foreword to *A Guide for Quorums of the Melchizedek Priesthood* [1930], 3; quoted in John A. Widtsoe, comp., *Priesthood and Church Government* [1939], 135).

We would encourage each priesthood quorum in the Church to cultivate such a brotherhood.

A quorum is a service unit

Finally, the only purpose for our Quorum is to be of service. Perhaps our deep feelings of this responsibility could be characterized in an epistle dated October 26, 1886, by Wilford Woodruff, who was then serving as President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles:

“I will say to the Apostles, our responsibility is very great. . . . What manner of men ought we to be? The whole earth is ripening in iniquity, and the Zion of God

should be prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. We should humble ourselves before the Lord and be in a position to be filled with the spirit of our calling, with the Holy Ghost, and with the revelations of Jesus Christ, that we may know the mind and will of God concerning us, and be prepared to magnify our calling and bring to pass righteousness, and be valiant in the testimony of Jesus Christ to the end. . . . There never was a time when the work of God required a more faithful testimony and labor from the Apostles and Elders than today" ("An Epistle," *Deseret News*, Nov. 24, 1886, 712).

Make of each of your quorums a great service organization for the benefit of all your quorum members.

Learn your duty and act in all diligence

Now this word of warning from the scriptures:

"Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which

he is appointed, in all diligence. He that is slothful shall not be counted worthy to stand, and he that learns not his duty and shows himself not approved shall not be counted worthy to stand" (D&C 107:99–100).

And so I say to you two Brethren who have joined us in our quorum, and to all of you brethren who belong to the priesthood of God, may God bless each of us in our calls to serve. May our faith strengthen as we serve in righteousness, faithfully keeping the commandments. May our testimonies ever grow stronger as we seek to find the fountain of eternal truth. May the brotherhood that exists in our quorums be of comfort and strength and security as we pass through this mortal part of our existence. May the joy of gospel service ever abide in our hearts as we go forward to fulfill our duties and responsibilities as servants in our Father in Heaven's kingdom is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Henry B. Eyring

A testimony of priesthood keys

In a chapel far from Salt Lake City, in a place where a member of the Quorum of the Twelve rarely goes, a father approached me. He led his young son by the hand. As they reached me, he looked down at the boy, called him by name, and said, nodding his head toward me, "This is an Apostle." I could tell by the sound of the father's voice that he was hoping his son would feel more than that he was meeting a dignified visitor. He hoped that his son would feel a conviction that priesthood keys were on the earth in the Lord's Church. His son will need that conviction again and again. He will need it when he opens a letter from some future prophet he has never seen calling him to a mission. He

will need it when he buries a child or a wife or a parent. He will need it for courage to follow direction to serve. He will need it for the comfort that comes from trusting a sealing power that binds forever.

Missionaries will invite investigators to meet a bishop or branch president today with the same intent. They hope that the investigators will feel far more than that they have met a nice man or even a great man. They will be praying that the investigators will feel a conviction that this apparently ordinary man holds priesthood keys in the Lord's Church. The investigators will need that conviction when they go into the waters of baptism. They will need it when they pay tithing. They will need that conviction when the bishop is inspired to give them a calling. They will need it

when they see him presiding in the sacrament meeting and when he nourishes them by teaching the gospel.

And so missionaries and fathers, and all of us who serve others in the true Church, want to help those we love gain a lasting testimony that the keys of the priesthood are held by the Lord's servants in His Church. I speak today to encourage all who labor to instill and strengthen that testimony.

Paul tries to build a testimony of keys

It will help to recognize some things. First, God is persistent and generous in offering the blessings of priesthood power to His children. Second, His children must choose for themselves to qualify for and receive those blessings. And third, Satan, the enemy of righteousness, has from the beginning tried to undermine the faith necessary to receive the blessings made possible by priesthood power.

I learned about those realities from a wise teacher nearly 25 years ago. I spoke in an ancient theater in Ephesus. Bright sunlight flooded the ground where the Apostle Paul had stood to preach. My topic was Paul, the Apostle called of God.

The audience was hundreds of Latter-day Saints. They were arranged on the rows of stone benches the Ephesians sat upon more than a millennium before. Among them were two living Apostles, Elder Mark E. Petersen and Elder James E. Faust.

As you can imagine, I had prepared carefully. I had read the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, both those of Paul and his fellow Apostles. I had read and pondered Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.

I tried my best to honor Paul and his office. After the talk, a number of people said kind things. Both of the living Apostles were generous in their comments. But later, Elder Faust took me aside and, with a smile and with softness in his voice, said, "That was a good talk. But you left out

the most important thing you could have said."

I asked him what that was. Weeks later he consented to tell me. His answer has been teaching me ever since.

He said that I could have told the people that if the Saints who heard Paul had possessed a testimony of the value and the power of the keys he held, perhaps the Apostles would not have had to be taken from the earth.

That sent me back to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I could see that Paul wanted the people to feel the value of the chain of priesthood keys reaching from the Lord through His Apostles to them, the members of the Lord's Church. Paul was trying to build a testimony of those keys.

Paul testified to the Ephesians that Christ was at the head of His Church. And he taught that the Savior built His Church on a foundation of apostles and prophets, who hold all the keys of the priesthood.

Loss and restoration of priesthood keys

Despite the clarity and the power of his teaching and his example, Paul knew that an apostasy would come. He knew that apostles and prophets would be taken from the earth. And he knew that they would, in some great, future day, be restored. He wrote of that time to the Ephesians, speaking of what the Lord would do: "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."¹

Paul looked forward to the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith, when the heavens would be opened again. It happened. John the Baptist came and conferred on mortals the priesthood of Aaron and the keys of the ministering of angels and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.

Ancient apostles and prophets returned and conferred upon Joseph the

keys they held in mortality. Mortal men were ordained to the holy apostleship in February of 1835. Priesthood keys were given to the Twelve Apostles in the latter part of March 1844.

The Prophet Joseph Smith knew that his death was imminent. He knew that the precious priesthood keys and the apostleship must not be and would not be lost again.

One of the Apostles, Wilford Woodruff, left us this account of what happened in Nauvoo as the Prophet spoke to the Twelve:

“On that occasion the Prophet Joseph rose up and said to us: ‘Brethren, I have desired to live to see this temple built. I shall never live to see it, but you will. I have sealed upon your heads all the keys of the kingdom of God. I have sealed upon you every key, power, principle that the God of heaven has revealed to me. Now, no matter where I may go or what I may do, the kingdom rests upon you.’”²

Every prophet that followed Joseph, from Brigham Young to President Hinckley, has held and exercised those keys and has held the sacred apostleship.

Faith unlocks power of priesthood keys

But just as in the time of Paul, the power of those priesthood keys for us requires our faith. We have to know by inspiration that the priesthood keys are held by those who lead and serve us. That requires the witness of the Spirit.

And that depends upon our testimony that Jesus is the Christ and that He lives and leads His Church. We must also know for ourselves that the Lord restored His Church and the priesthood keys through the Prophet Joseph Smith. And we must have an assurance through the Holy Ghost, refreshed often, that those keys have been passed without interruption to the living prophet and that the Lord blesses and directs His people through the line of priest-

hood keys which reaches down through presidents of stakes and of districts and through bishops and branch presidents to us, wherever we are and no matter how far from the prophet and the apostles.

That is not easy today. It was not easy in the days of Paul. It has always been hard to recognize in fallible human beings the authorized servants of God. Paul must have seemed an ordinary man to many. Joseph Smith’s cheerful disposition was seen by some as not fitting their expectations for a prophet of God.

Efforts to undermine faith in keys

Satan will always work on the Saints of God to undermine their faith in priesthood keys. One way he does it is to point out the humanity of those who hold them. He can in that way weaken our testimony and so cut us loose from the line of keys by which the Lord ties us to Him and can take us and our families home to Him and to our Heavenly Father.

Satan succeeded in undermining the testimony of men who had, with Joseph Smith, seen the heavens opened and heard the voices of angels. The evidence of their physical eyes and ears was not enough when they no longer could feel the testimony that the priesthood keys were still in place with Joseph.

The warning for us is plain. If we look for human frailty in humans, we will always find it. When we focus on finding the frailties of those who hold priesthood keys, we run risks for ourselves. When we speak or write to others of such frailties, we put them at risk.

We live in a world where finding fault in others seems to be the favorite blood sport. It has long been the basis of political campaign strategy. It is the theme of much television programming across the world. It sells newspapers. Whenever we meet anyone, our first, almost unconscious reaction may be to look for imperfections.

Evidence of keys after a disaster in Idaho

To keep ourselves grounded in the Lord's Church, we can and must train our eyes to recognize the power of the Lord in the service of those He has called. We must be worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. And we need to pray for the Holy Ghost to help us know that men who lead us hold this power. For me, such prayers are most often answered when I am fully engaged in the Lord's service myself.

It happened in the aftermath of a disaster. A dam in Idaho broke on a June day. A wall of water struck the communities below it. Thousands of people, mostly Latter-day Saints, fled their homes to go to safety.

I was there as the people faced the terrible task of recovery. I saw the stake president gather his bishops to lead the people. We were cut off in those first days from any supervision from outside. I was in the meeting of local leaders when a director from the federal disaster agency arrived.

He tried to take over the meeting. With great force he began to list the things that he said needed to be done. As he read aloud each item, the stake president, who was sitting near him, said quietly, "We've already done that." After that went on for five or ten minutes, the federal official grew silent and sat down. He listened quietly as the stake president took reports from the bishops and gave directions.

For the meeting the next day, the federal disaster official arrived early. He sat toward the back. The stake president began the meeting. He took more reports, and he gave instructions. After a few minutes, the federal official, who had come with all the authority and resources of his great agency, said, "President Ricks, what would you like us to do?"

He recognized power. I saw more. I recognized the evidence of keys and the faith that unlocks their power.

It happened again when a man and his wife arrived back in town just after the dam had broken. They didn't go to their home. They went first to find their bishop. He was covered in mud, leading his members in mucking out homes. They asked what he would have them do.

They went to work. Much later, they took a few minutes to check on their own house. It was gone. So they went back to work wherever their bishop asked them to help. They knew where to go to get the Lord's direction for service in His Church.

Faith as keys are passed to new leaders

I learned then as I have since how the stakes of Zion become places of safety. They become like a great family, united, caring for each other. It comes by simple faith.

By faith they are baptized and receive the Holy Ghost. As they continue to keep the commandments, that gift becomes constant. They can recognize spiritual things. It becomes easier to see the power of God working through the common people God calls to serve and lead them. Hearts are softened. Strangers become fellow citizens in the Lord's kingdom, united in loving bonds.

That happy condition will not last without a constant renewal of faith. The bishop we love will be released, as will the stake president. The Apostles we followed in faith will be taken home to the God who called them.

With those continual changes comes a great opportunity. We can act to qualify for the revelation that allows us to know that the keys are being passed by God from one person to another. We can seek to have that experience again and again. And we must, in order to receive the blessings God has for us and wants us to offer to others.

The answer to your prayer is not likely to be as dramatic as it was when some saw Brigham Young, as he spoke, take on

the appearance of the martyred Prophet Joseph. But it can be as sure. And with that spiritual assurance will come peace and power. You will know again that this is the Lord's true and living Church, that He leads it through His ordained servants, and that He cares about us.

If enough of us exercise that faith and receive those assurances, God will lift up those who lead us and so bless our lives and our families. We will become what Paul so wanted for those he served: "built upon the foundation of the apostles and

prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."³

I testify, I know that Jesus Christ is our Savior and that He lives. I know that He is the rock upon which this, His true Church, stands. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Ephesians 1:10.
2. "The Keys of the Kingdom," *Millennial Star*, Sept. 2, 1889, 546; or *Ensign*, Apr. 2004, 30.
3. Ephesians 2:20.

Elder Ned B. Roueché

Rescuing a brother in Mexico

When I was a young missionary serving in Mexico, I was called to serve as branch president in a small town in the state of Veracruz. When my companion and I were reviewing the membership records of our little branch, we found the record of a brother who had been ordained a deacon but had not been attending the meetings.

We arranged to make a visit with him. While visiting him, we invited him to come to the meetings and serve in his priesthood responsibilities. The following Sunday he came but was not properly dressed and was unshaven. So we taught him about being clean and neat when he officiated in those sacred priesthood responsibilities, which included passing the sacrament. His life changed considerably as he served faithfully. That branch was my last assignment in the mission before returning home. When I was ready to leave the branch, this good brother came and put his arms around me, picked me up, and with a big hug swung me around. As he did, the tears rolled down his cheeks, and he said, "Thank you for coming and helping me."

Nurture with constant, tender care

Sometimes we just lose our focus and drift away. Sometimes we have our feelings hurt or some other problem occurs. It all ends up the same, and we fail to claim the blessings that can be ours. Pride, distrust, deceit, discouragement, and many kinds of sin can be removed by a change in our hearts and by following the path that the Savior has shown us. He says, "Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me" (D&C 19:23). The Savior has paid our ransom. He loves each of us and reaches out to all who will come and follow Him.

There is a flame of desire for good deep within each of us. When that flame is fed and nurtured with the eternal truths of the gospel and the testimony of the Spirit, it will respond and grow stronger and brighter until it leads us to the fulness of truth. The flame must be kindled by love and tender care, then followed by constant nourishing. It is like the gardener who raises beautiful flowers. The constant, tender care and nourishment over time brings beautiful blossoms that are enjoyed by all who see them.

Forgive others

Forgiveness is also a key part of our return to happiness in our Father's kingdom. At one time or another we may become offended or wronged, and this can become a stumbling block that may take us away from our eternal goal, which is to return to the presence of our Heavenly Father. The Savior taught us the pattern for forgiveness as He taught the Lord's Prayer. He said, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). We can see from this that to be forgiven, it is conditional upon us to forgive others. This at times can be difficult when the wounds are deep and have been endured for a long time.

However, in these latter days the Savior taught this principle even more clearly in these words:

"My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened.

"Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.

"I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men" (D&C 64:8–10).

When we follow this counsel, it will help us to overcome even the toughest of trials.

When we forgive and let go of that which has weighed heavily on our hearts and taken us off the path, a great burden is lifted from our souls and we are free—free to move forward and progress in our pursuit of the gospel of Jesus Christ with an increase of love in our hearts. We will be blessed with an increase of enthusiasm for life, and our hearts will be lighter. A surge of spiritual energy will propel us forward in joy and happiness. The problems of the past will be cast away like old,

worn-out clothes. "And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep" (Alma 5:60).

Come back and be filled with joy

It takes courage to come back when we have gotten off the Savior's path. I promise you that when you exercise that courage and take the steps necessary, you will find that there will be an outpouring of love. There are many who will rejoice with you, and the hand of fellowship will be extended. You will be nurtured, and your heart will be filled with joy.

"Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;

"For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. . . .

"And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!" (D&C 18:10–11, 13).

Reach out to those who have strayed

We are all brothers and sisters, children of our Heavenly Father. We must reach out to those who for some reason have forgotten the path. We love you and invite you to come to the table and share in the spiritual banquet that the Lord has prepared for your joy and happiness. You will know of our Heavenly Father's love as you come with a heart that is willing, obedient, and ready to partake and serve. He knows you; He knows your needs and what faces you in the future. He has a perfect understanding of the feelings, suffering, and trials of each one of us. Because of that and the infinite Atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ, you will be able to face every challenge that comes to you in your sojourn here in this life.

We all have a great responsibility that has been placed on our shoulders by the Savior. He said, "Feed my sheep" (John

21:17). That includes searching out those who are not with us and extending to them our love and fellowship. They stood with us in our first estate. They have made sacred covenants through baptism, and perhaps even in the temple. They now need our help.

I pray that each of us can think about our families and our friends and acquaintances who are not enjoying the full blessings of the gospel. Think about those over whom you have a responsibility because of your calling. Ask yourself, "What can I do?" Heavenly Father will guide you as you seek His help. Then go and search them out and invite them to return and enjoy full fellowship and the wonderful message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Let them feel your love and hear your testimony. Help them to recall the feelings that they once knew of the eternal truths that will make their lives full of joy and happiness.

May we be anxiously engaged in gathering in His sheep who have gone astray so they can be safe in the fold. He "who is mighty to save" (2 Nephi 31:19) is the Good Shepherd, and He loves His sheep. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

The choir and congregation will now sing "Come, Come, Ye Saints."

Following the singing, we will hear from Elder Ronald T. Halverson of the Seventy, after which we shall hear from Sister Bonnie D. Parkin, Relief Society general president. Elder Donald L. Staheli of the Seventy will then address us.

The choir and congregation sang "Come, Come, Ye Saints."

Elder Ronald T. Halverson

"You can know as surely as I know"

A few weeks ago I was in a social gathering with a friend of many years—a friend who recently retired, is well educated, and has been very successful. He is recognized in his country as the leader in his field. As we sat next to one another at dinner, he turned to me and asked about the Church. This was somewhat surprising because I was aware that he, like many in the world today, had rationalized God out of existence. His question was earnest. It was apparently something he had been thinking about because it came without anything in the previous conversation that would have prompted it.

I responded by telling him of the Restoration—that God, the Eternal Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph Smith and that through him the priesthood and authority of God were re-

stored to the earth. I bore witness that I knew assuredly that what I had told him was true. There was a long pause as I watched him ponder what I had said. Then, knowing that he was internalizing what he had heard, I leaned over and said, "You can know as surely as I know that what I have borne witness to is true. If you will 'ask God, the Eternal Father, . . . with a sincere heart, . . . having faith in Christ, [I promise you that] he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost [you] may know the truth of all things.'"¹

He continued to ponder. Unfortunately we were interrupted by the other guests and that precious moment passed, but I knew that in his heart he was still internalizing what he had heard and felt. And I hope that an opportunity will come

again, for there is so much more that I would like to share with him. I know that he, like thousands or millions of others in the world today, is content with life as it is. As Nephi stated, they have been pacified and lulled away “into carnal security.”² They have been steeped in traditions and taught by the precepts of men.

As I have reflected on that moment, I have asked myself the question “What is the reward for following the philosophies of men?” The answer seems clear: the philosophies die with their civilizations and are left in the dust of the past without hope of eternal reward. I felt my friend had been touched by the Spirit of the Lord. Our Heavenly Father never gives up on us.

How to know whether teachings are true

The Savior said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”³ But we must have the desire to open the door, even if it shakes the very foundation of our past beliefs and way of life. And this applies to less-active members as well as those who are not yet members of the Church. I am reminded of the words of a hymn:

Know this, that ev’ry soul is free
To choose his life and what he’ll be;
For this eternal truth is giv’n:
That God will force no man to heav’n.

He’ll call, persuade, direct aright,
And bless with wisdom, love, and light,
In nameless ways be good and kind,
But never force the human mind.⁴

Our Father in Heaven will never take away our agency. We must seek after or desire to know our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. There is a way by which all of us can know whether or not the teachings of Jesus Christ are true. As Jesus answered

the skeptics at the Feast of Tabernacles, He said, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”⁵

President David O. McKay said that this “is the most simple test to give knowledge to an individual of which the human mind can conceive. *Doing a thing, introducing it into your very being*, will convince you of whether it is good or whether it is bad. You may not be able to convince *me* of that which you know, but *you know it*, because *you have lived it*.”⁶

What is the Father’s will? “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bears testimony to the world that the ‘will’ of God has been made manifest in this dispensation; that the principles of the gospel, the principles of life, have been revealed. [That] they are in harmony with the principles which Christ taught in the meridian of time”⁷ and that “through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”⁸

Learn by the Spirit, not just the mind

We live in a day of rationalization; people want to discount spiritual experiences, and they deny themselves revelation. What happened to the seeking mind, the open mind, the inquiring mind—one seeking to know truth and knowledge? We tend to rely on our own rational powers. The Lord wants us to be sensitive to the Spirit, and He has given us a pattern:

“And again, I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations—

“Wherefore he that prayeth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me if he obey mine ordinances.

“He that speaketh, whose spirit is contrite, whose language is meek and edifieth, the same is of God if he obey mine ordinances.”⁹

Blessings of knowing God and His Son

Why is it important for us to seek to know truth?

Jesus, our Redeemer, just before He crossed the brook of Cedron and was betrayed by Judas, offered the glorious prayer of intercession. He prayed to the Father for us. He said, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."¹⁰

To know God and His Son is eternal life. How can we learn to know God if we are unwilling to seek after Him and do His will? Eternal life is what we should desire more than anything else in this world.

One cannot study about Jesus Christ and His teachings without being affected and changed for good. As you develop a testimony of the Savior, you want to become like Him and to follow Him, and thus you enter the waters of baptism and make a sacred covenant with Him.

Our Savior is concerned for each one of us:

"Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;

"For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him.

"And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance.

"And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!"¹¹

Because of His great love for us—a divine love—He wants us to experience the kind of joy that He, Himself, experiences. He said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."¹² He will bless us with a genuine peace—mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually, economically—"not [a peace] as the world giveth,"¹³ but a "peace . . . which passeth all understanding."¹⁴

As one complies with the will of our Father in Heaven, there will come spiritual, intellectual, and emotional growth and a reassurance through the Holy Spirit of Truth. That reassurance and joy can grow to a perfect knowledge. The Savior said, "If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal."¹⁵

Come to know God by doing His will

To the less active, to the honest in heart, to my friend, and to the good people of the earth, I invite you to awake out of complacency and foolish contentment and come unto Christ and do whatever it takes to earnestly seek truth, to know God, the Eternal Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ. For "this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God."¹⁶

I bear my witness that as you do His will, you will feel close to Him and begin to know what eternal joy is and that eternal life is attainable. You will know that He does exist, that He is our Father, who lovingly reveals to us the reality of the Atonement and the Resurrection and the divinity of this great work. To this I bear my humble witness, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Moroni 10:4–5.
2. 2 Nephi 28:21.
3. Revelation 3:20.
4. "Know This, That Every Soul Is Free," *Hymns*, no. 240.
5. John 7:17.
6. "What Is Eternal Life?" *Instructor*, Mar. 1968, 97.
7. David O. McKay, *Instructor*, Mar. 1968, 98.
8. Articles of Faith 1:3.

9. Doctrine and Covenants 52:14–16.
10. John 17:3.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 18:10–13.
12. John 15:11.
13. John 14:27.
14. Philippians 4:7.
15. Doctrine and Covenants 42:61.
16. 2 Nephi 31:21.

Sister Bonnie D. Parkin

How has Relief Society blessed your life?

Looking back on his life, a man recently shared this tender story with me:

“When I was growing up, my father was less active in the Church. He struggled with alcohol—and in his darkest moods could become harsh and accusing. He normally didn’t object to Mom serving in the ward. She worked in Primary for 38 years, and during much of that time she also served in Young Women. She carried a heavy load. Her marriage was difficult, and I now know that she was discouraged at times, but I didn’t know it then.

“I didn’t realize until later that the sisters in our ward were her strength. She didn’t work in the Relief Society leadership, but she always attended the meetings, and she loved her friends there. I never thought of them as the ladies of Relief Society; they were simply Mom’s sisters. They cared about her and loved her. She had all brothers and all sons. She found the sisters she wanted and needed in our ward. I know she shared her feelings with them—feelings she couldn’t express anywhere else. None of that seemed ‘Relief Society’ to me then, but I understand now that it was.”¹

This son’s memory of Relief Society touched my heart. Yes, Relief Society’s members are women, but Relief Society does not bless only the women; it blesses each one of us.

How has Relief Society blessed your life?

I asked this question of President Hinckley. He responded: “Relief Society has blessed my family and the family of

my dear wife for some seven generations. Since the earliest days of the Church, our mothers and daughters have been taught of their obligations to those in distress. They have been schooled in the finer points of homemaking, encouraged in their spiritual development, and guided in the realization of their full potential as women. Much of this has taken place in Relief Society and has then been brought home to bless the life of each member of my family.”²

I have my own sweet memories of playing under my grandmother’s quilting frames as she and her Relief Society sisters stitched. I was young, but I knew that this was part of Relief Society—blessing the lives of others. I was mentored with love for Relief Society by my mother and my grandmother. I love Relief Society—I think I always have. Relief Society has helped me know the Savior and has strengthened my love for Him and my Heavenly Father. My belonging to Relief Society has provided me with many opportunities to learn, love, serve, and be filled with the love of the Lord in my life as I strive to keep my covenants, exercise charity, and strengthen my family.

So I ask again, how many ways has Relief Society blessed your life?

A fundamental part of the gospel

Visiting the Missionary Training Center in Brazil, I said to the missionaries, “Tell me what you know about Relief Society.” One elder said, “Casseroles!” Another added, “My mother and sister belong to it.” Finally, one declared, “It’s the Lord’s

organization for women.” He was right, but there’s more. Relief Society is “a *fundamental* part of the gospel.”³

The year 1842 was extremely difficult for the Prophet Joseph Smith. Former friends had turned on him. Other enemies wanted to abduct him from Nauvoo and blunt the growth of the Church. That same year he organized the Relief Society to care for the poor and needy and “to save souls.”⁴ President J. Reuben Clark Jr. observed that amidst these trials, Joseph Smith “turned to the sisters for the consolation, for the uplift of which he stood in such sad need at that time.”⁵ This is a moving and humbling thought: a prophet of God seeking the solace of his sisters—women to whom he had given the charge “charity never faileth.”⁶ To me this has echoes of those women who mourned with the Savior on Golgotha.

Relief Society has blessed prophets’ lives. How has it blessed yours?

Relief Society strengthens home, family

President Boyd K. Packer has said, “The defenses of the home and family are greatly reinforced when the wife and mother and daughters belong to Relief Society.”⁷ Why? Because women are the heart of the home.

My belonging to Relief Society has renewed, strengthened, and committed me to be a better wife and mother and daughter of God. My heart has been enlarged with gospel understanding and with love of the Savior and what He’s done for me. So to you, dear sisters, I say, Come to Relief Society! It will fill your homes with love and charity; it will nurture and strengthen you and your families. Your home needs your righteous heart.

During a recent assignment to Peru, I visited the humble home of Brother and Sister Morales. It was filled with love. They are the parents of three children and have been members of the Church for four years. Sister Morales has learned much in

Relief Society. To help provide for their family and their missionary son, she took in washing and ironing. She helped with two children of a neighbor who had to leave home to work. She supported her husband, who is struggling with kidney failure and was serving in the elders quorum. They discussed the Heber J. Grant lessons together in preparation for his teaching the lesson.

I asked her, “Are you a visiting teacher?” With a smile on her face she responded, “Oh, yes, Sister Parkin. I visit four sisters. Two are less active, but I will love them back.”

Leaving their home, I noticed a hand-drawn sign above the door. It asked, “Did you read your scriptures today?” Relief Society is blessing this home, this ward, this neighborhood. How has it blessed you?

A blessing for new members and for sons

Belonging to Relief Society is critical for newly baptized sisters and, by extension, their families. While serving with my husband as he presided over the England London South Mission, I met many new converts—like Gloria, a single mother. When she joined the Church, she joined Relief Society. It was a safe place where she could ask questions about her new-found faith. She heard women openly share their experiences, which led her to experiment upon the word of God.⁸ She’s received her patriarchal blessing; she’s been to the temple; she serves in the Church. I think of President Hinckley’s counsel to me: “[Women] need to be together in an environment that bolsters faith.”⁹ Relief Society provides such an environment.

I thought of the stripling warriors when I heard the son of a Relief Society sister say: “I have been blessed by the faith and example of my mother. By the time I became a priesthood holder, I had learned as much about home teaching from my mother’s visiting teaching efforts as by my

father's example of home teaching. . . . Her faith in the priesthood affects my faith and strengthens my desire to be [a] worthy . . . elder."¹⁰

Participate with more vigor

Brothers and sisters, I am changed and blessed, I am better because of Relief Society. And I believe we all are.

I pray that mothers and daughters will participate with more vigor, that husbands will support their wives, and that both mothers and fathers will prepare their daughters for Relief Society. I encourage priesthood leaders to shepherd God's daughters, young and old, into Relief Society—one of the many miracles of the Restoration. As we take these steps, we will be overwhelmed with gratitude for this sacred organization.

Because Relief Society is divinely designed, it blesses not only women but the

family and the Church. I testify that it is a fundamental part of the Lord's restored gospel because it abides in charity—His pure love. Of this I bear witness, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Personal correspondence.
2. Personal correspondence.
3. Joseph Fielding Smith, "The Relief Society Organized by Revelation," *Relief Society Magazine*, Jan. 1965, 4; italics added.
4. See *History of the Church*, 5:25.
5. "The Prophet's Sailing Orders to Relief Society," *Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1949, 797.
6. Moroni 7:46.
7. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 96; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 73.
8. See Alma 32:27.
9. Personal conversation.
10. Personal correspondence.

Elder Donald L. Staheli

Securing our testimonies

Recently I had an engaging conversation with a young man who was contemplating a mission. As we talked, it became apparent that he was struggling with his decision because he was questioning the strength of his testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wanted to know why he had not received more clear answers to his prayers and study of the scriptures.

This young man, whom I will call Jim, was raised in the mission field in a home with loving parents who were doing their best to teach gospel principles to their children.

He is an outstanding athlete and popular among his friends at school. However, he is only one of a very few LDS students in a large high school.

Having raised my family in the mission field, I quickly related to Jim's challenges of wanting to stay true to gospel principles while being accepted by good friends, yet friends whose values and beliefs generally differed from his.

He was looking for further confirmation of his testimony of Jesus Christ and the restoration of the gospel.

Today I speak to Jim and many others like him—young men and young women across the world who are unsure about their testimonies but very much want to develop strong, vibrant testimonies that will guide them through the shoals of life that lie ahead.

I also speak to those adults who have not yet felt deeply the spirit of the gospel in their lives. In the absence of a compelling testimony, some have let their daily

thoughts and actions become so focused on the things of the world that they have minimized the influence of the light of the gospel in their everyday lives.

And then as Elder Neal A. Maxwell has so eloquently described, also included are those “‘honorable’ members who are skimming over the surface instead of deepening their discipleship and who are casually engaged rather than ‘anxiously engaged’ (D&C 76:75; 58:27)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1992, 89; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 65).

Do your very best to gain a testimony

As I attended the funeral services of Elder Neal A. Maxwell and Elder David B. Haight and listened to their well-deserved tributes, I more fully internalized the extraordinary examples of testimony and discipleship that the lives of these two great brethren demonstrated. I kept pondering how their examples could help strengthen our testimonies and deepen our resolve to come closer to Christ.

These two great disciples of Christ exemplify President Gordon B. Hinckley’s admonition to all of us when he said:

“I have been quoted as saying, ‘Do the best you can.’ But I want to emphasize that it be the very best. We are too prone to be satisfied with mediocre performance. We are capable of doing so much better” (“Standing Strong and Immovable,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 10, 2004, 21).

Surely President Hinckley’s counsel and encouragement applies as much to the development and strengthening of our testimonies of Jesus Christ as to anything else.

Testimonies come in varied times, ways

True testimonies bring the light of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ into our lives and focus all of us toward the same goal of returning to our Father in Heaven

—yet our individual testimonies come through varied experiences and at different stages in our lives.

Like Jim, as a young man I was privileged to have “goodly parents” (1 Nephi 1:1). They taught gospel principles and values to our family by precept and example. As a young boy I thought I had a testimony. I believed! Then came some personal spiritual experiences through faith, prayer, scripture study, and especially father’s blessings in our home that caused me to think more seriously about the principles I had been taught and believed—but even more deeply about what I was beginning to feel. I will be forever grateful to parents who helped coach me through those precious spiritual experiences. They have had a lasting impact on me and on the strength of my testimony.

Alma teaches how to gain a testimony

I think Alma must have had us in mind as he was teaching the Zoramites how to gain testimonies of the truth:

“But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words” (Alma 32:27).

Alma then went on to “compare the word unto a seed.” He explained that as hearts are opened, “it will begin to swell within your breasts” (Alma 32:28). Alma then gave us the key to developing a successful testimony:

“But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:41).

And then the promise!

“Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you” (Alma 32:43).

Think with me for a moment, brothers and sisters, about what Alma is teaching us.

First, we must have a sincere *desire* to believe. Phrases such as “*awake*,” “*arouse your faculties*,” “*experiment*,” and “*exercise a particle of faith*” are action words that suggest sustained effort on our part.

His description of the swelling in our breast describes the feeling of the Holy Spirit. And as Moroni promises, “By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5).

To keep that Spirit growing, Alma says we must nourish it by “faith with great diligence, and with patience.” He then promises that the rewards of faith, diligence, patience, and long-suffering will bring forth everlasting life (Alma 32:41; see also v. 43).

Like Alma, latter-day prophets have been clear in their teachings of the things we need to do to develop and strengthen our testimonies.

We have been sent here to work out our individual salvation through the tests and challenges of daily life. We cannot do that by relying heavily upon the borrowed light of someone else’s testimony. As we receive inspiration when we hear prophets, leaders, and peers bear their testimonies, those spiritual feelings should further enhance our desire to strengthen our own convictions.

Daily fervent prayer is essential

To my young friend, and to all wherever you may be, never give up on the Lord. The answer to your prayers may not be as clear or as timely as you would like, but keep praying. The Lord is listening! As you pray, ask for help in understanding the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And

then do your very best to be worthy to receive those promptings. As you recognize or feel the impressions and whisperings of the Spirit, then act upon them.

Daily fervent prayers seeking forgiveness and special help and direction are essential to our lives and the nourishment of our testimonies. When we become hurried, repetitive, casual, or forgetful in our prayers, we tend to lose the closeness of the Spirit, which is so essential in the continual direction we need to successfully manage the challenges of our everyday lives. Family prayer every morning and night adds additional blessings and power to our individual prayers and to our testimonies.

Scripture study is essential

Personal, sincere involvement in the scriptures produces faith, hope, and solutions to our daily challenges. Frequently reading, pondering, and applying the lessons of the scriptures, combined with prayer, become an irreplaceable part of gaining and sustaining a strong, vibrant testimony. President Spencer W. Kimball reminded us of the importance of consistent scripture reading when he said:

“I find that when I get casual in my relationships with divinity and when it seems . . . no divine voice is speaking, . . . if I immerse myself in the scriptures the distance narrows and the spirituality returns” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 135).

The Savior taught, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

The strong, unwavering testimonies that so many of you wonderful, faithful members of the Church embrace have come from prayerfully following counsel from our prophets and the scriptures. That same priceless blessing is available to each of us who earnestly seek it.

Strong testimonies are a bulwark of armor

To my young friend Jim, and all others who may have periodic concerns about the strength of their testimonies, know that you are loved and watched over daily by your Father in Heaven. He will respond as you strive to keep His commandments and reach out for His loving hand.

We all share the same promise that the Lord gave to the Prophet Joseph Smith: "Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (D&C 88:63).

Our prophet's call to do our "very best" challenges each of us, individually and within our families, to carefully examine our personal lives and then commit to change those things which will more fully assure our testimonies are strong and secure.

Strong testimonies become the driving force for each of us to do "much better." They become the impenetrable bulwark of armor that protects us from the unrelenting things of the world.

I bear my witness that we have a loving, caring Father in Heaven and that He and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to the boy Joseph to usher in the Restoration of the gospel in this last dispensation.

Jesus Christ heads this Church. President Gordon B. Hinckley is His chosen prophet.

May we have the courage and the conviction to follow the prophet's counsel. As we do so, our personal testimonies will be secure. That this may be so I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting, which will commence in the Conference Center this evening at 6:00 p.m. mountain daylight time.

The nationwide Mormon Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 a.m. mountain daylight time. The Sunday morning session of conference will immediately follow.

Today we thank the Primary choir for the beautiful music they have provided this afternoon. The choir has been a great inspiration to the speakers and to all of us.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following his remarks, the choir will sing "My Heavenly Father Loves Me" and "I Will Follow God's Plan." At the conclusion of the singing, the benediction will be offered by Elder Gordon T. Watts of the Seventy.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

Testimony is the foundation of our faith

I recently returned from an assignment in Asia, where we met with faithful Saints and missionaries. One meeting was in a metropolitan area where we have approximately 14,000 Church members living within a population of nearly 21 million people. If that same ratio were applied to this meeting, in the Conference Center we would have only 13 members

of the Church scattered among this congregation of over 20,000.

This experience impressed upon me how deeply grateful we must all be to know that after ages of darkness and apostasy, Joseph Smith beheld a remarkable vision of the Father and the Son in the Sacred Grove. Clearly, in our world today it is a rare and precious thing to have a testimony that God our Heavenly Father lives;

that His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer; and that priesthood authority to administer the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored once again upon the earth. The profound blessing of having a testimony of these truths cannot be measured or ever taken for granted.

Personal testimony is the foundation of our faith. It is the binding power that makes The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints unique in the lives of its members, as compared with all other religious denominations of the world. The doctrine of the Restoration is glorious in and of itself, but the thing that makes it powerful and imbues it with great meaning is the personal testimonies of Church members worldwide who accept the Restoration of the gospel and strive to live its teachings every day of their lives.

A testimony changes lives

A testimony is a witness or confirmation of eternal truth impressed upon individual hearts and souls through the Holy Ghost, whose primary ministry is to testify of truth, particularly as it relates to the Father and the Son. When one receives a testimony of truth through this divinely appointed process, it immediately begins to have impact on that person's life. According to Alma the Younger, "it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves . . . the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me" (Alma 32:28).

Simply stated, testimony—real testimony, born of the Spirit and confirmed by the Holy Ghost—changes lives. It changes how you think and what you do. It changes what you say. It affects every priority you set and every choice you make. To have a real and abiding testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be "spiritually . . .

born of God," to "[receive] his image in your countenances," and to experience a "mighty change in your hearts" (Alma 5:14).

Anchor testimonies in gospel principles

Like almost everything else in life, testimonies grow and develop through experience and service. We often hear some members, and especially children, bear their testimonies, listing things for which they are thankful: their love of family, the Church, their teachers, their friends. For them, the gospel is something that they are grateful for because it makes them feel happy and secure. This is a good beginning, but testimonies need to be much more. They need to be anchored very early to the first principles of the gospel.

A testimony of the reality of Heavenly Father's love, of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and of the effect of His Atonement on every son and daughter of God brings about the desire to repent and live worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. It also brings a confirmation to our soul of the Restoration of the gospel in these latter days. Real testimony of these precious truths comes as a witness by the Holy Ghost after sincere and dedicated effort, including teaching in the home, prayer, scripture study, service to others, and diligent obedience to Heavenly Father's commandments. To gain and forever hold on to a testimony of gospel truths is worth whatever price in spiritual preparation we may be required to pay.

Center testimony meetings on the Savior

My experience throughout the Church leads me to worry that too many of our members' testimonies linger on "I am thankful" and "I love," and too few are able to say with humble but sincere clarity, "I know." As a result, our meetings sometimes lack the testimony-rich, spiri-

tual underpinnings that stir the soul and have meaningful, positive impact on the lives of all those who hear them.

Our testimony meetings need to be more centered on the Savior, the doctrines of the gospel, the blessings of the Restoration, and the teachings of the scriptures. We need to replace stories, travelogues, and lectures with pure testimonies. Those who are entrusted to speak and teach in our meetings need to do so with doctrinal power that will be both heard and felt, lifting the spirits and edifying our people.

Bearing testimony ignites a fire of belief

You will remember that at the heart of King Benjamin's powerful sermon to his people was his personal witness of the Savior, who at that time had yet to be born into mortality. At one point in the king's sermon, when he had just borne witness to the people, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy . . . because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come" (Mosiah 4:3). That is because the Spirit cannot be restrained when pure testimony of Christ is borne. Thus, King Benjamin's people were so inspired by his testimony that their lives were changed right there, on the spot, and they became as new people.

Remember also Abinadi and Alma. Abinadi infuriated wicked King Noah with his courageous testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. Eventually this great missionary offered the ultimate sacrifice for his witness and faith but not before his pure testimony touched one believing heart. Alma, one of King Noah's priests, "repented of his sins . . . , [accepted Jesus as the Christ,] and went about privately among the people, and began to teach the words of Abinadi" (Mosiah 18:1). Many were converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ as a direct result of Abinadi's pow-

erfully borne testimony of the Savior, believed by one soul—Alma.

The Apostle Paul also bore fervent testimony of Christ and converted many through his missionary labors. He did not shrink in bearing his testimony before King Agrippa. So mighty were his words that even this influential representative of the Roman Empire was moved to exclaim, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28).

The lesson, I believe, is clear: having a testimony alone is not enough. In fact, when we are truly converted, we cannot be restrained from testifying. And as it was with Apostles and faithful members of old, so is it also our privilege, our duty, and our solemn obligation to "declare the things which [we] know to be true" (D&C 80:4).

Again, please keep in mind that we are talking about sharing real testimony, not just speaking generally about the things we are thankful for. While it is always good to express love and gratitude, such expressions do not constitute the kind of testimony that will ignite a fire of belief in the lives of others. To bear testimony is "to bear witness by the power of the Holy Ghost; to make a solemn declaration of truth based on personal knowledge or belief" (Guide to the Scriptures, "Testify," 241). Clear declaration of truth makes a difference in people's lives. That is what changes hearts. That is what the Holy Ghost can confirm in the hearts of God's children.

Although we can have testimonies of many things as members of the Church, there are basic truths we need to constantly teach one another and share with those not of our faith. Testify that God is our Father and Jesus is the Christ. The plan of salvation is centered on the Savior's Atonement. Joseph Smith restored the fulness of the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Book of Mormon is evidence that our testimony is true.

Testifying to those who are not members

Miraculous things happen when members join with missionaries and share pure testimony with those who are not members of the Church. For example, while many people were touched by Alma's testimony in the land of Ammonihah, when Amulek stood and added his testimony to Alma's, "the people began to be astonished, seeing there was more than one witness who testified" (Alma 10:12). The same thing can happen with us today. As we stand together the Lord will help us find many more of His sheep who will know His voice as we unitedly share our testimonies with them.

Many years ago, Brigham Young told of an early missionary in the Church who was asked to share his testimony with a large group of people. According to President Young, this particular elder "never had been able to say that he knew Joseph [Smith] was a Prophet." He would have preferred to just say a prayer and leave, but the circumstances made that impossible. So he started to speak, and "as soon as he got 'Joseph' out, 'is a Prophet,' was . . . next; and from that, his tongue was loosened, and he continued talking until near sun-down."

President Young used this experience to teach that "the Lord pours out His Spirit upon a man, when he testifies that [which] the Lord gives him to testify of" (*Millennial Star*, supplement, 1853, 30).

Far-reaching effects of Hyrum's testimony

The Prophet's brother Hyrum understood this and testified fearlessly of divine truth as it had been revealed to his brother Joseph and confirmed in his own heart. His testimony blessed the lives of many, including Parley P. Pratt. When Parley first encountered the Book of Mormon, Hyrum took him into his own home and spent the night teaching and testifying to him. He bore witness of the prophetic mantle that

rested upon Joseph and of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Shortly thereafter, Hyrum set aside his own needs and went with Parley to honor his request for baptism. (See *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. [1938], 35–42.)

We may never fully comprehend or be able to measure the far-reaching effects of Hyrum's one-on-one testimony to Parley P. Pratt. In addition to Parley's faithful posterity, his apostolic witness and missionary service drew countless souls into the kingdom of God. Interestingly, included among those who joined the Church as a direct result of his ministry in Canada were Joseph Fielding and his sisters, Mary and Mercy. After his first wife, Jerusha, died, Hyrum met and married Mary Fielding, and from their marriage came President Joseph F. Smith and countless other members and Church leaders. Now I realize that not all testimonies will return such a blessing as Hyrum's did.

Beneficiaries of humble testimonies

Joseph Kimber, a humble new convert in Thatcham, England, bore his simple testimony to a fellow farmhand. I believe Brother Kimber's witness of Joseph Smith and the Restoration is what ignited the fire of belief in 17-year-old Henry Ballard's heart and caused him to ask to be baptized. Generations of the Ballard family are the beneficiaries of that humble testimony.

Members and missionaries in our day can have the experience of converting others by living our lives as best we can and being prepared "to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:9). A friend recently told me about being on a 90-minute bus ride in Brazil. He felt impressed to go to the back of the bus to speak to the young people who had been serving as guides for his group of businessmen. An associate of his father followed him to the back of the bus and heard his testimony of the truth-

fulness of the restored gospel. This man later said, "When I heard your testimony, I had the distinct feeling go through my whole body that these things were true." He and his wife will soon be baptized.

Boldly share testimonies

The missionaries are now preparing to teach the lessons not as memorized dialogue or a rote presentation, but rather they will outline gospel principles in an organized way, calling upon the Spirit to direct how they communicate gospel truth to investigators, spirit to spirit and heart to heart. Brothers and sisters, join together with the missionaries in sharing your precious testimony every day, witnessing at every opportunity the glorious message of the Restoration. The fire of your testimony is all that you need in order to introduce the gospel to many more of our Father's children. Trust in the Lord, and never underestimate the impact your testimony can have upon the lives of others as you bear it

with the power of the Spirit. Doubt and fear are tools of Satan. The time has come for all of us to overcome any fear and boldly take every opportunity to share our testimonies of the gospel.

May the Lord bless you as you continue to nurture your testimonies through your prayers, your personal gospel study, and your acts of service. With great joy I humbly testify our Heavenly Father loves us, Jesus is the Christ, Joseph Smith restored the fulness of the everlasting gospel, and the Book of Mormon testifies of these truths. We are led by a living prophet today. And I pray that the Lord may bless you, my dear brothers and sisters, as you teach and testify, which I ask in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "My Heavenly Father Loves Me" and "I Will Follow God's Plan."

Elder Gordon T. Watts offered the benediction.

GENERAL PRIESTHOOD SESSION

The general priesthood session of the 174th Semiannual General Conference, convened in the Conference Center at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 2, 2004. President Gordon B. Hinckley conducted this session.

Music was provided by men of the Tabernacle Choir, joined by members of the Orchestra at Temple Square. Mack Wilberg and Craig Jessop directed the choir, and Richard Elliott and John Longhurst were the organists.

President Hinckley opened the meeting with the following remarks.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Brethren, we welcome you to this general priesthood session of the 174th Semi-

annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

These services are being relayed by satellite transmission to holders of the priesthood gathered in the Tabernacle, the Assembly Hall, the BYU Marriott Center, the Provo Missionary Training Center, and in locations in many countries throughout the world.

The singing for this session will be furnished by the men of the Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square, under the direction of Mack Wilberg and Craig Jessop, with Richard Elliott and John Longhurst at the organ.

We shall begin this priesthood session with the choir singing "Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah." The invocation will then be offered by Bishop Keith B. McMullin

of the Presiding Bishopric. The choir will then sing “I Need Thee Every Hour.”

Following the singing, we will hear from Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Elder Carl B. Pratt of the Seventy, after which we shall hear from Elder Cecil O. Samuelson of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah.”

Bishop Keith B. McMullin offered the invocation.

The choir sang “I Need Thee Every Hour.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

I am grateful to speak to this worldwide audience of priesthood holders. It is now 8:00 a.m. Sunday morning in the Philippines, my home for the last two years. I send greetings to my beloved associates in that nation and to all of you.

I assume there are no boys in this audience, only young men who are holders of the priesthood. The Apostle Paul wrote that when he was a child he understood as a child, but when he became a man he put away such things (see 1 Corinthians 13:11). You young men are doing the same, so I will speak to you as one man speaks to another.

Be not deceived

From your position on the road of life, you young men have many miles to go and many choices to make as you seek to return to our Heavenly Father. Along the road there are many signs that beckon. Satan is the author of some of these invitations. He seeks to confuse and deceive us, to get us on a low road that leads away from our eternal destination.

In the beginning, when a powerful spirit was cast down for rebellion, “he became Satan, . . . the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will” (Moses 4:4). He and the spirits who follow him are still deceiving the world. Modern revelation declares that “Satan hath sought to deceive you, that he might overthrow you”

(see D&C 50:2–3). Satan’s methods of deception are enticing: music, movies and other media, and the glitter of a good time. When Satan’s lies succeed in deceiving us, we become vulnerable to his power.

Methods of deception

Here are some ways the devil will try to deceive us. God’s commandments and the teachings of His prophets warn against each of them.

Being misled about whom to follow

1. One kind of deception seeks to mislead us about whom we should follow. In speaking of the last days, the Savior taught: “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:4–5). In other words, many will seek to deceive us by saying that they or their teachings will save us, so there is no need for a Savior or His gospel. The Book of Mormon describes this as “the power of the devil, to lead away and deceive the hearts of the people . . . to believe that the doctrine of Christ was a foolish and a vain thing” (3 Nephi 2:2).

Being deceived about right and wrong

2. Satan also seeks to deceive us about right and wrong and to persuade us that there is no such thing as sin. This detour typically starts off with what seems to be

only a small departure: “Just try it once. One beer or one cigarette or one porno movie won’t hurt.” What all of these departures have in common is that each of them is addictive. Addiction is a condition in which we surrender part of our power of choice. When we do that, we give the devil power over us. The prophet Nephi described where this leads: the devil says, “There is no hell” and “I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance” (2 Nephi 28:22).

If we choose the wrong road, we choose the wrong destination. For example, a friend of many years told me that her husband, always a “good kid” in high school, took a few drinks that he thought would help him forget some problems. Before he knew what was happening, he was addicted. Now he is not able to support his family, and he is ineffective at almost everything he tries to do. Alcohol governs his life, and he cannot seem to break free of its grip.

Being pacified and lulled into carnal security

3. The prophet Nephi warns against another kind of deception: “And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell” (2 Nephi 28:21).

Those who fall for this deception may profess to believe in God, but they do not take His commandments or His justice seriously. They are confident in their own prosperity and conclude that God must have accepted their chosen route.

“Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.

“And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; never-

theless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; . . . there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 28:7–8).

Surely you have seen and heard these arguments, brethren. They will come at you in classrooms and hallways, in what you read, and in what you see in popular entertainment. Many in the world deny the need for a Savior. Others deny that there is any right or wrong, and they scoff at the idea of sin or a devil. Still others rely on the mercy of God and ignore His justice. The prophet said, “There shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines” (2 Nephi 28:9).

Paul’s warnings against being deceived

The Apostle Paul gave pointed warnings about the “perilous times” that would come in the last days. “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, . . . disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, . . . despisers of those that are good, . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1–4). He also said that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (v. 13). In a moment I will discuss what Paul told young Timothy about how to avoid this wickedness.

The Apostle gave another warning against being deceived by the devil and his pawns:

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

“Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9–10).

Be not deceived, brethren. Heed the ancient and modern prophetic warnings against thievery, drunkenness, and all forms of sexual sin. The deceiver seeks to destroy your spirituality by all of these means. Paul warns us against those who “lie in wait to deceive” “by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness” (Ephesians 4:14). Beware of the slick package and the glitz of a good time. What the devil portrays as fun can be spiritually fatal.

We cannot escape consequences of sin

As we look about us, we see many who are practicing deception. We hear of prominent officials who have lied about their secret acts. We learn of honored sports heroes who have lied about gambling on the outcome of their games or using drugs to enhance their performance. We see less well-known persons engaging in evil acts in secret they would never do in public. Perhaps they think no one will ever know. But God always knows. And He has repeatedly warned that the time will come when “[our] iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and [our] secret acts shall be revealed” (D&C 1:3; see also Mormon 5:8; D&C 38:7).

“Be not deceived,” the Apostle Paul taught. “God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6:7–8).

In other words, if we indulge in drugs or pornography or other evils that the Apostle called sowing to the flesh, eternal law dictates that we harvest corruption rather than life eternal. That is the justice of God, and mercy cannot rob justice. If an eternal law is broken, the punishment affixed to that law must be suffered. Some of this can be satisfied by the Savior’s Atonement, but the merciful cleansing of a soiled sinner comes only after repentance

(see Alma 42:22–25), which for some sins is a prolonged and painful process. Otherwise, “he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption” (Alma 34:16).

Fortunately, repentance is possible. For the most serious sins we need to confess to our bishop and seek his loving help. For other sins it may be sufficient for us to confess to the Lord and to whomever we have wronged. Most lying is of this sort. If you have deceived someone, resolve now to stop carrying the burden. Make it right and get on with your life.

How to avoid being deceived

Hold fast to the scriptures

Now I wish to speak about how each of us can avoid being deceived on matters of eternal importance. I have two texts. The first is what Paul taught Timothy after giving him the warning I quoted earlier. Continue in the things you have learned and been assured of, he wrote, “knowing of whom thou hast learned them” (2 Timothy 3:14). In other words, you have been taught righteousness and assured of its truth, so stay with it. Continuing, Paul reminded his young friend “that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation” through faith in our Savior (v. 15). Hold fast to the scriptures, whose teachings protect us against evil.

Be guided by the Holy Spirit

The parable of the ten virgins teaches that when the Lord comes in His glory, of all followers of Christ invited to the wedding feast, only half will be given entrance. The inspired explanation of this parable reveals our second source of protection:

“For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day” (D&C 45:57).

The other half will be denied entrance because they are not prepared. It is not enough to have received the truth. We must also “have taken the Holy Spirit for [our] guide” and “not [be] deceived.”

How do we take the Holy Spirit for our guide? We must repent of our sins each week and renew our covenants by partaking of the sacrament with clean hands and a pure heart, as we are commanded to do (see D&C 59:8–9, 12). Only in this way can we have the divine promise that we will “always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77). That Spirit is the Holy Ghost, whose mission is to teach us, to lead us to truth, and to testify of the Father and the Son (see John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; 3 Nephi 11:32, 36).

To avoid being deceived, we must also follow the promptings of that Spirit. The Lord taught this principle in the 46th section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

“That which the Spirit testifies unto you even so I would that ye should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving, that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men. . . .

“Wherefore, beware lest ye are deceived; and that ye may not be deceived seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given” (D&C 46:7–8).

The Holy Ghost will protect us against being deceived, but to realize that wonderful blessing we must always do the things necessary to retain that Spirit. We must keep the commandments, pray for guid-

ance, and attend church and partake of the sacrament each Sunday. And we must never do anything to drive away that Spirit. Specifically, we should avoid pornography, alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, and always, always avoid violations of the law of chastity. We must never take things into our bodies or do things with our bodies that drive away the Spirit of the Lord and leave us without our spiritual protection against deception.

Be doers of the word, not hearers only

I will conclude by describing another subtle form of deception—the idea that it is enough to hear and believe without acting on that belief. Many prophets have taught against that deception. The Apostle James wrote, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22). King Benjamin taught, “And now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them” (Mosiah 4:10). And in modern revelation the Lord declares, “If you will that I give unto you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you” (D&C 78:7).

It is not enough to know that God lives, that Jesus Christ is our Savior, and that the gospel is true. We must take the high road by acting upon that knowledge. It is not enough to know that President Gordon B. Hinckley is God’s prophet. We must put his teachings to work in our lives. It is not enough to have a calling. We must fulfill our responsibilities. The things taught in this conference are not just to fill our minds. They are to motivate and guide our actions.

I testify that these things are true, and I pray that we will do all that is necessary to avoid the deceptions of the devil, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Carl B. Pratt

A proper fast day observance

Brethren, I hope you noticed this morning, as President Hinckley prepared to announce the names of two new Apostles, he spoke of fasting and praying to know the Lord's will.

Fasting has always been a practice among God's people. In our day it is a commandment given by the Lord to all members of the Church. In addition to occasional special fasts that we might have for personal or family reasons, we are expected to fast once a month on the first Sunday. We are taught that there are three aspects to a proper fast day observance: first, abstaining from food and drink for two consecutive meals or, in other words, 24 hours; second, attending fast and testimony meeting; and third, giving a generous fast offering.

For the Pratt family our regular fasts have always been from the Saturday noon meal to the Sunday noon meal. That way we fast for two meals, Saturday evening and Sunday morning meals. Although there is no Church standard for fasting, except that it should be for 24 hours and two meals, we have found a spiritual advantage in attending fast and testimony meeting toward the end of the fast.

For those who are physically able, fasting is a commandment. Speaking of our monthly fast day, President Joseph F. Smith said:

"The Lord has instituted the fast on a reasonable and intelligent basis. . . . Those who can are required to comply . . . ; it is a duty from which they cannot escape; . . . it is left with the people as a matter of conscience, to exercise wisdom and discretion. . . .

"But those should fast who can. . . . None are exempt from this; it is required of the Saints, old and young, in every part of the Church" (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 244).

I fear, brethren, that too many of us are either not fasting on fast day or we are doing so in a lackadaisical manner. If we are guilty of taking our fast day for granted or simply fasting Sunday morning instead of making it two complete meals—24 hours—we are depriving ourselves and our families of the choice spiritual experiences and blessings that can come from a true fast.

Fasting with a purpose

If all we do is abstain from food and drink for 24 hours and pay our fast offering, we have missed a wonderful opportunity for spiritual growth. On the other hand, if we have a special purpose in our fasting, the fast will have much more meaning. Perhaps we can take time as a family before beginning our fast to talk about what we hope to accomplish by this fast. This could be done in a family home evening the week before fast Sunday or in a brief family meeting at the time of family prayer. When we fast with purpose, we have something to focus our attention on besides our hunger.

The purpose of our fast may be a very personal one. Fasting can help us overcome personal flaws and sins. It can help us overcome our weaknesses—help them become strengths. Fasting can help us become more humble, less prideful, less selfish, and more concerned about the needs of others. It can help us see more clearly our own mistakes and weaknesses and help us be less prone to criticize others. Or our fast may have a focus on a family challenge. A family fast might help increase love and appreciation among family members and reduce the amount of contention in the family, or we might fast as a couple to strengthen our marriage bonds. A purpose of our fast as priesthood holders might be to seek the Lord's guidance in our callings, as President Hinckley has demonstrated, or we might fast with

our home teaching companion to know how to help one of our families.

Power of combining fasting and prayer

Throughout the scriptures the term *fasting* is usually combined with prayer. “Ye shall continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth” is the Lord’s counsel (D&C 88:76). Fasting without prayer is just going hungry for 24 hours. But fasting combined with prayer brings increased spiritual power.

When the disciples were unable to cure a boy who was possessed of an evil spirit, they asked the Savior, “Why could not we cast him out?” Jesus responded, “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:19, 21).

Let us begin our fasts with prayer. This could be kneeling at the table as we finish the meal with which we begin the fast. That prayer should be a natural thing as we speak to our Heavenly Father concerning the purpose of our fast and plead with Him for His help in accomplishing our goals. Likewise, let us end our fasts with prayer. We could very appropriately kneel at the table before we sit down to consume the meal with which we break our fast. We would thank the Lord for His help during the fast and for what we have felt and learned from the fast.

In addition to a beginning and ending prayer, we should seek the Lord often in personal prayer throughout the fast.

Teaching children about fasting

We should not expect our young children to fast for the recommended two meals. But let us teach them the principles of fasting. If fasting is discussed and planned in a family setting, the small children will be aware that their parents and older siblings are fasting, and they will understand the purpose of the fast. They should participate in the family prayers to begin and end the fast. This way, when

they reach the proper age, they will be eager to fast with the rest of the family. In our family, we have done this by encouraging our children between 8 and 12 years of age to fast for one meal; then as they have turned 12 and received the Aaronic Priesthood or entered Young Women, we have encouraged them to fast for two complete meals.

The Lord’s description of a proper fast

After chastising ancient Israel for fasting improperly, the Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, speaks in beautiful poetic language of a proper fast:

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6).

If we fast and pray with the purpose of repenting of sins and overcoming personal weaknesses, surely we are seeking to “loose the bands of wickedness” in our lives. If the purpose of our fast is to be more effective in teaching the gospel and serving others in our Church callings, we are surely striving to “undo the heavy burdens” of others. If we are fasting and praying for the Lord’s help in our missionary efforts, aren’t we desiring to “let the oppressed go free”? If the purpose of our fast is to increase our love for our fellow man and overcome our selfishness, our pride, and having our hearts set upon the things of this world, surely we are seeking to “break every yoke.”

The Lord continues describing the proper fast: “Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?” (Isaiah 58:7). It is truly a wonderful thing that through our fast offerings today we can feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and clothe the naked.

The blessings of a proper fast

If we fast properly, the Lord promises:

“Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; . . .

“Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. . . .

“And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday:

“And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, . . . and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not” (Isaiah 58:8–11).

It is my prayer that we can improve our fasts so we can enjoy these beautiful promised blessings. It is my testimony that as we “draw near” to the Lord through our fasting and prayer, He will “draw near” to us (see D&C 88:63). I testify that He lives, that He loves us, and that He wants to draw near to us. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Cecil O. Samuelson Jr.

Perilous times

Brethren, it is both comforting and potentially worrisome to know that we live in an age and a time that was not only foreseen by the prophets of previous dispensations but was also clearly a focus of their concerns and their aspirations. The Apostle Paul said, “In the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Timothy 3:1), and then he went on to catalog and describe with remarkable accuracy much that we currently see daily in the media, in advertisements for entertainment, and almost everywhere in the world around us. As careful as we might and should be, absolute avoidance of much of the peril which is seemingly enveloping us is at best difficult and often nearly impossible to avoid.

Happily, we are not left without hope or spiritual sustenance as we strive individually and as families to accomplish the sacred purposes of mortal life for which we came to this earthly probation. Each of our circumstances is unique. We come literally from the four corners of the earth, and we also come from tremendously different families, backgrounds, challenges,

opportunities, experiences, triumphs, and disappointments.

Likewise, in common with all of the human family—everyone being the progeny of our loving Heavenly Father—we share vast congruence in our DNA or genetic physical makeup, as well as the universally possible and promised blessings and characteristics that identify our divine parentage and spiritual potential. It is this special blending of our common origins and characteristics and also of our unique attributes, experiences, and specialized challenges that makes each of us who and what we are. While we may have differences in what constitutes special peril for us individually, we share much that establishes the apt description of “perilous times” for all.

Continue in the things you have learned

Paul, in describing our “perilous times,” did not promise that things would necessarily get easier or necessarily better. He did give counsel to those seeking comfort and assurance in the face of the deteriorating conditions of our day. Just as his prophecies or predictions were clearly

accurate, so is his direction to us remarkably relevant as well. Said he, "Continue . . . in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (2 Timothy 3:14).

In this general conference, consistent with the pattern covering the entire history of the Church, we have learned and will learn of the restoration of the gospel in our day; of the remarkable clarity and testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ found in the Book of Mormon; of the mission and contributions of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors in the Presidency of the Church, including especially President Gordon B. Hinckley, who teaches and testifies with such power, spirituality, and lucidity; and of the strength, comfort, and blessings that accrue from the presence of other living apostles and prophets in our midst. Not only do we learn these things, but we are assured that they are true, knowing, as Paul said, "of whom [we have] learned them."

Alma's witness of Jesus Christ

Another who was authorized to assure those to whom he ministered was Alma. As he expressed his pleasure at the privilege of teaching and testifying to the people of Gideon, he was forthright, clear, and direct in his witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was yet to come in His earthly ministry. He expressed his delight at the general faith and faithfulness of this group of good people and promised them that they would be the recipients of "many things to come" (Alma 7:7). In the midst of his discourse, describing things yet to come, he said, "There is one thing which is of more importance than they all—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people" (Alma 7:7).

Alma was speaking in his time specifically of the events of a few decades hence

when the Savior would be born into mortality. Centuries have passed, and Alma's prophecies have been largely fulfilled, but the central fact of his estimation of the thing more important than all else is still absolutely true, completely relevant, and fundamentally essential for us today as well. It is that "the Redeemer liveth."

Gaining a testimony of Jesus Christ

As Alma and "all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began" (Mosiah 13:33) have taught and testified of the coming of the Messiah and His mission to redeem His people, so do we join in bearing testimony of Him and His sacred work "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Surely when we begin to understand the magnitude of His sacrifice and service to us individually and collectively, we then cannot consider anything else to be of more importance or to approach His significance in our lives.

For most of us, this understanding does not come all at once and likely will not be fully complete during our mortal sojourn. We do know, however, that as we learn line upon line, our appreciation for the Savior's contributions will increase and our knowledge and assurance of their truthfulness will grow.

The Apostle Paul was forceful and candid in much of his teaching and preaching. Listen to these familiar words that may describe most of us in our efforts and progression and yet provide the counsel, encouragement, and witness that we so badly need:

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:11–12).

Many years ago, President James E. Faust gave this counsel to those still struggling to become fully convinced in their testimonies of Jesus Christ and His sacred mission and promises. Said he:

“For those who have honest doubts, let us hear what eyewitnesses had to say about Jesus of Nazareth. The ancient apostles were there. They saw it all. They participated. No one is more worthy of belief than they. Said Peter: ‘For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.’ (2 Pet. 1:16.) Said John: ‘For we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.’ (John 4:42.) Modern-day witnesses, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, declared: ‘For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father.’ (D&C 76:23.)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1976, 83–84; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 59).

Testimony of Christ is the greatest gift

In our own day, we have been promised that the Lord has many gifts in store for “those who love [Him] and keep all [His] commandments” and also those “that seeketh so to do” (D&C 46:9). While not every gift of God is pledged to every person, we have been assured that “to every [person] is given a gift by the Spirit of God” (D&C 46:11).

Listen to these words from the 46th section of the Doctrine and Covenants that address the question of the thing or gift of more importance than any other:

“To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.

“To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful” (verses 13–14).

Gratitude for assurance that Jesus lives

It is this knowledge and testimony of the living Christ that allows us to be continually responsive to the advice and counsel of Peter, who said that we must “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

When we begin to really sense that this hope is real and is actually centered in Jesus, being made possible because of His love for us and especially His love of His Father, then we can gratefully and individually proclaim, using the words of a favorite hymn, “I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me” (“I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, no. 193). Likewise, as our understanding unfolds, we are led to exclaim, “Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee, How great thou art! How great thou art!” (“How Great Thou Art,” *Hymns*, no. 86).

How grateful I am, in these perilous times, for the protection and guidance that are given to us by the sacred assurance that Jesus Christ lives today, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Thank you, brethren.

We shall now hear from President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency. The choir and congregation will then sing “Praise to the Man.” At the conclusion of the singing, we will hear from President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency.

President James E. Faust

The key of the knowledge of God

Brethren of the priesthood of God, I am again seated as I deliver my message this evening. As you are aware, I am working through a temporary back problem. Those of you who have had back trouble will understand. Those of you who haven't—just wait a while! Any other explanation of what ails me is not true!

I humbly speak to you tonight with a prayer in my heart that you may understand me by the power of the Spirit. It is hard to imagine anything more important for us as priesthood holders to learn than the key of the knowledge of God. This evening I would like to speak concerning that key.

The greater priesthood administers the gospel and holds “the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.”¹ What is the key of the knowledge of God, and can anyone obtain it? Without the priesthood there can be no fulness of the knowledge of God. The Prophet Joseph Smith said the “Melchizedek Priesthood . . . is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven.”² President Joseph F. Smith stated:

“One who can truly affirm that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and Jesus is the Savior, has in his possession a prize beyond computation. When we know this we know God, and we have a key to all knowledge.”³

Father Abraham recognized the value of this grand key as he recounted his experience:

“I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a

greater knowledge, . . . and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.”⁴

How to obtain greater knowledge of God

Anyone who is righteous and desires to possess greater knowledge and to become “a greater follower of righteousness” can, under the authority of the priesthood, obtain a greater knowledge of God. The Lord tells us one clear way to do so, as given in the Doctrine and Covenants: “If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, . . . that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.”⁵

One might ask, “How do I become a greater follower of righteousness?” A righteous person is one who makes and keeps gospel covenants. These are holy contracts, usually between individuals and the Lord.⁶ Sometimes they include other persons, such as spouses. They involve most sacred promises and commitments, such as baptism, the conferral of the priesthood, temple blessings, marriage, and parenthood. Many of the blessings of Father Abraham come as the Holy Ghost is poured out upon all people.⁷ Any worthy man or woman who receives the Holy Ghost can actually become “a new creation.”⁸

The oath and covenant of the priesthood

To obtain the full portion of these supernatural blessings and come to a full knowledge of God, a man must enter into and keep the oath and covenant of the priesthood.⁹ President Marion G. Romney insightfully pointed out:

“The only way a man can make the maximum progress towards eternal life, for which mortality is designed, is to obtain and magnify the Melchizedek Priest-

hood. . . . It is of utmost importance that we keep clearly in mind what the magnifying of our callings in the priesthood requires of us. . . . It requires at least the following three things:

“1. That we obtain a knowledge of the gospel.

“2. That we comply in our personal living with the standards of the gospel.

“3. That we give dedicated service.”¹⁰

Two covenants are to be made by each priesthood holder. The first is to be faithful unto the obtaining of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods.¹¹ The Aaronic Priesthood trains and prepares the priesthood holder for the greater duties of the Melchizedek Priesthood and prepares him to receive the blessings of the oath and covenant of the priesthood. Holding both the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods is essential to receive the full blessings that the Lord has for His faithful sons. The second covenant as His agent in this holy authority is to be faithful in magnifying one’s calling with total faith in God.¹²

As part of the oath and covenant of the priesthood, the Lord makes several promises to His faithful sons “which he cannot break.”¹³ First, the priesthood holders “are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.”¹⁴ I think President Hinckley is a great example of this. He has been renewed in body, mind, and spirit in a most remarkable manner. Second, “they become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham.”¹⁵ Third, they become “the elect of God.”¹⁶ As His agents, they carry forth this holy work in our time on the earth. Fourth, “all they who receive this priesthood receive [the Lord].”¹⁷ Fifth, those who receive the Lord’s servants receive Him.¹⁸ Sixth, those who receive the Savior receive God the Father.¹⁹ Seventh, they also receive the Father’s kingdom.²⁰ Eighth, they also shall be given all that the Father hath.²¹ Those who receive all that the Father hath can receive nothing more.

Aaronic Priesthood is a very real power

You young men of the Aaronic Priesthood have been given great authority and responsibilities. Under the direction of the bishop, the Aaronic Priesthood functions in at least two ordinances that are directly related to the Atonement. One is the sacrament, which is in remembrance of the Savior’s blood shed for our sins and His body which He gave as a ransom for us.²² The second is baptism. Priests have authority to perform baptisms for the remission of sins. The Aaronic Priesthood is a very real power. One young man wrote this of his experience in exercising this power:

“At one time I attended a ward which had almost no Melchizedek Priesthood holders in it. But it was not in any way dulled in spirituality. On the contrary, many of its members witnessed the greatest display of priesthood power they had ever known.

“The power was centered in the priests. For the first time in their lives they were called upon to perform all the duties of the priests and administer to the needs of their fellow ward members. They were seriously called to home teach—not just to be a yawning appendage to an elder making a social call but to bless their brothers and sisters.

“Previous to this time I had been with four of these priests in a different situation. . . . They drove away every seminary teacher after two or three months. They spread havoc over the countryside on Scouting trips. *But when they were needed—when they were trusted with a vital mission—they were among those who shone the most brilliantly in priesthood service.*

“The secret was that the bishop called upon his Aaronic Priesthood to rise to the stature of men to whom angels might well appear; and they rose to that stature, administering relief to those who might be in want and strengthening those who needed

strengthening. Not only were the other ward members built up but so were the members of the quorum themselves. A great unity spread throughout the ward and every member began to have a taste of what it is for a people to be of one mind and one heart. There was nothing inexplicable in all of this; it was just the proper exercise of the Aaronic Priesthood.”²³

President Gordon B. Hinckley recently told the Aaronic Priesthood that those of you who live worthy lives can be blessed by the “protection of ministering angels” and that you “have something magnificent to live up to.”²⁴

Significance of being the seed of Abraham

What does it mean to be the seed of Abraham? Scripturally it has a deeper meaning than being his literal descendants. The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, the great patriarch, that all nations would be blessed through him.²⁵ Any man or woman can claim the blessings of Abraham. They become his seed and heirs to the promised blessings by accepting the gospel, being baptized, entering into temple marriage, being faithful in keeping their covenants, and helping to carry the gospel to all the nations of the earth.

To be empowered to “bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations,”²⁶ a man must receive the Melchizedek Priesthood with its blessings. Then through faithfulness he becomes an heir to the fulness of eternal life. For as Paul said, “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”²⁷

As the seed of Abraham, we have some obligations. We are commanded to come to Christ by doing “the works of Abraham.”²⁸ These works include obeying God, receiving and keeping priesthood and temple ordinances and covenants, preaching the gospel, building a family unit and teaching our children, and being faithful to the end.

It is interesting that the Lord used the word *seed* in His promise to Abraham. It has a fuller meaning than *posterity* because it means to multiply the blessings of the covenant of Abraham “unto all nations.”²⁹ The Lord promised Abraham a posterity “as innumerable as the stars” or “the sand upon the seashore.”³⁰

Abraham’s righteous posterity is also privileged to be adopted into the eternal family of Jesus Christ. This includes the right to receive eternal covenants in the temple by which, if they are worthy, they will be organized and exalted in the eternal family of Christ.³¹ It also includes “the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.”³²

Losing an arm becomes a blessing

The patriarchal order runs from Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob. Through the line of the priesthood, it continues in our own day and time. Through the ages, blessings and promises were given from the fathers to their faithful sons. A modern example of this is taken from the life of Elder John B. Dickson of the Seventy. He recalls:

“When it was time for me to go on a mission, I was very excited to serve the Lord. Just before I was to leave, however, I found out that I had bone cancer. The chance of living long enough to serve a mission wasn’t very high. I had faith that the Lord would provide a way if He wanted me to go. My father gave me a blessing in which I was told that I would serve my mission in Mexico, serve in the Church all my life, and have a family. My right arm had to be amputated above the elbow, but my life was spared, and the promises I was given have all been fulfilled.

“Some would think that losing an arm would be a terrible burden, but it has been one of the greatest blessings in my life. I learned that it is very important to have challenges and to face up to them.”

Elder Dickson had always been right-handed, and now he had to learn to do everything left-handed. One struggle was learning how to tie his ties. He said:

“One Sunday morning when I was in my bedroom with my tie in my hand, I thought, *How am I going to tie this?* I thought about getting a clip-on tie. I thought about asking Mom to help me. But I couldn’t take her with me on my mission just to tie my ties. So I decided I had to learn how to do it myself. I finally figured it out by using my teeth. I still do it that way, even after having tied it thousands of times.”³³

Great promises to those who are faithful

We don’t know in detail all that is going to be required of humanity, of the Saints of God in the uncertain days ahead. Everyday righteous living will be increasingly difficult. In addition, holders of the priesthood may well have to meet some extra challenges in safeguarding and providing for their families. As one world leader recently pointed out, there will be “dangers common to us all. Today’s deadly threats come from rogue powers and stateless networks of extremists who have nothing but contempt for the sanctity of human life and for the principles civilized nations hold dear.”³⁴

We can all expect to face trials. But great eternal promises are extended to those who persist in righteousness. The Lord has given His word that “any man that shall . . . fail not to continue faithful in all things, shall not be weary in mind, neither darkened, neither in body, limb, nor joint. . . . And they shall not go hungry, neither athirst.”³⁵ I am optimistic about what the future holds for the Lord’s Church and its members, but we will have to persist in righteousness and be “faithful in all things.”³⁶ The key of the knowledge of God, administered by those who keep

the oath and covenant of the Melchizedek Priesthood, will enable us to come off as the sons of God. That we will do so, I pray humbly in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 84:19.
2. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 166–67.
3. “The M. I. Course: Remarks at the B. Y. Academy,” *The Daily Enquirer* (Provo, UT), Jan. 30, 1892.
4. Abraham 1:2.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 42:61.
6. See Carlos E. Asay, in Conference Report, Oct. 1985, 56–60; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 43–45.
7. See 3 Nephi 20:25–29.
8. See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 149–50.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–42.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1962, 18; or *Improvement Era*, June 1962, 416.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33.
12. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 84:40.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 84:33.
15. Doctrine and Covenants 84:34.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 84:34.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 84:35.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:36.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:37.
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
22. See Matthew 26:26–28; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 26:22–24.
23. Quoted in Victor L. Brown, in Conference Report, Oct. 1975, 101–2; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1975, 68.
24. Quoted in Jason Swensen, “Priesthood Restored Directly from Heaven,” *Church News*, May 22, 2004, 3.
25. See Genesis 18:18; Galatians 3:8; 3 Nephi 20:25, 29.
26. Abraham 2:9.
27. Galatians 3:29.
28. John 8:39; see also John 8:32–50.
29. Abraham 2:9.
30. Doctrine and Covenants 132:30.

31. See Galatians 3:29.
32. Abraham 2:11.
33. "Friend to Friend," *Friend*, Sept. 1995, 7.
34. Colin Powell, "Of Memory and Our Democracy," *USA Weekend*, May 2, 2004, Internet, <http://www.usaweekend.com>.

35. Doctrine and Covenants 84:80.
36. Doctrine and Covenants 84:80.

The choir and congregation sang
"Praise to the Man."

President Thomas S. Monson

Be anxiously engaged

My dear brethren, it is a solemn and somewhat humbling experience to stand before you this evening and respond to the invitation to teach and to testify concerning the sacred privilege which is ours to bear the priesthood of God. I pray for your faith and your prayers in my behalf.

Beyond those who hold the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood who are in attendance this evening here in this beautiful Conference Center or seated in locations worldwide, there are vast numbers of priesthood bearers who, for whatever reason, have drifted from their duties and have chosen to pursue other pathways.

The Lord speaks rather plainly to us to reach out and rescue such individuals and bring them and theirs to the table of the Lord. We well could pay heed to the Lord's divine instructions when He declared, "Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence."¹ He added:

"For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.

"Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

"For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And in-

asmuch as men do good they shall in no-wise lose their reward."²

Jesus's example of doing good

The sacred scriptures provide for you and me a model to follow when they declare, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."³ And He "went about doing good, . . . for God was with him."⁴

I have observed in studying the life of the Master that His lasting lessons and His marvelous miracles usually occurred when He was doing His Father's work. On the way to Emmaus He appeared with a body of flesh and bones. He partook of food and testified of His divinity. All of this took place after He had exited the tomb.

At an earlier time, it was while He was on the road to Jericho that He restored sight to one who was blind.

The Savior was ever up and about—teaching, testifying, and saving others. Such is our individual duty as members of priesthood quorums today.

A plea to priesthood holders

In a proclamation of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles issued on April 6, 1980, this declaration of testimony and truth was set forth:

"We solemnly affirm that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is in fact a restoration of the Church established by the Son of God, when in mortal-

ity he organized his work upon the earth; that it carries his sacred name, even the name of Jesus Christ; that it is built upon a foundation of Apostles and prophets, he being the chief cornerstone; that its priesthood, in both the Aaronic and Melchizedek orders, was restored under the hands of those who held it anciently: John the Baptist, in the case of the Aaronic; and Peter, James, and John in the case of the Melchizedek.”⁵

On October 6, 1889, President George Q. Cannon expressed this plea:

“I want to see the power of the Priesthood strengthened. . . . I want to see this strength and power diffused through the entire body of the Priesthood, reaching from the head down to the least and most humble deacon in the Church. Every man should seek for and enjoy the revelations of God, the light of heaven shining in his soul and giving unto him knowledge concerning his duties, concerning that portion of the work of God that devolves upon him in his Priesthood.”⁶

I share with you tonight two experiences from my life—one which took place when I was a boy and the other pertaining to a friend of mine who was a husband and father of children.

An adviser uses pigeons to teach

Not long after my ordination as a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood, I was called to serve as president of the quorum. Our adviser, Harold, was interested in us, and we knew it. One day he said to me, “Tom, you enjoy raising pigeons, don’t you?”

I responded with a warm, “Yes.”

Then he proffered, “How would you like me to give you a pair of purebred Birmingham Roller pigeons?”

This time I answered, “Yes, Sir!” You see, the pigeons I had were just the common variety, trapped on the roof of the Grant Elementary School.

He invited me to come to his home the next evening. The following day was one of the longest in my young life. I was awaiting my adviser’s return from work an hour before he arrived home. He took me to his pigeon loft, which was in the upper area of a small barn located at the rear of his yard. As I looked at the most beautiful pigeons I had yet seen, he said, “Select any male, and I will give you a female which is different from any other pigeon in the world.” I made my selection. He then placed in my hand a tiny hen pigeon. I asked what made her so different. He responded, “Look carefully, and you’ll notice that she has but one eye.” Sure enough, one eye was missing, a cat having done the damage. “Take them home to your loft,” he counseled. “Keep them in for about 10 days, and then turn them out to see if they will remain at your place.”

I followed Harold’s instructions. Upon his release, the male pigeon strutted about the roof of the loft, then returned inside to eat. But the one-eyed female was gone in an instant. I called Harold and asked, “Did that one-eyed pigeon return to your loft?”

“Come on over,” he said, “and we’ll have a look.”

As we walked from his kitchen door to the loft, my adviser commented, “Tom, you are the president of the teachers quorum.” This, of course, I already knew. Then he added, “What are you going to do to activate Bob, who is a member of your quorum?”

I answered, “I’ll have him at quorum meeting this week.”

Then he reached up to a special nest and handed me the one-eyed pigeon. “Keep her in a few more days and try again.” This I did, and once more she disappeared. Again the experience: “Come on over, and we’ll see if she returned home.” Came the comment as we walked to the loft, “Congratulations on getting Bob to priesthood meeting. Now what

are you and Bob going to do to activate Bill?"

"We'll have him there next week," I volunteered.

This experience was repeated over and over again. I was a grown man before I fully realized that indeed Harold, my adviser, had given me a special pigeon, the only pigeon in his loft he knew would return every time she was released. It was his inspired way of having an ideal personal priesthood interview with the president of the teachers quorum every two weeks. I owe a lot to that one-eyed pigeon. I owe more to that quorum adviser. He had the patience and the skill to help me prepare for the responsibilities which lay ahead.

Fathers, grandfathers, we have an even greater responsibility to guide our precious sons and grandsons. They need our help; they need our encouragement; they need our example. It has been wisely said that our youth need fewer critics and more models to follow.

Shelley's miraculous change of heart

Now for the illustration pertaining to those men whose habits and lives include but little Church attendance or Church activity of any kind. The ranks of these prospective elders have grown larger. This is because of those younger boys of the Aaronic Priesthood quorums who are lost along the Aaronic Priesthood pathway and also those grown men who are baptized but do not persevere in activity and faith so that they might be ordained elders.

I not only reflect on the hearts and souls of such individual men, but also sorrow for their sweet wives and growing children. These men await a helping hand, an encouraging word, and a personal testimony of truth expressed from a heart filled with love and a desire to lift and to build.

Shelley, my friend, was such a person. His wife and children were fine members,

but all efforts to motivate him toward baptism and then priesthood blessings had failed miserably.

But then Shelley's mother died. Shelley was so sorrowful that he retired to a special room at the mortuary where the funeral was being held. We had wired the proceedings to this room so that he might mourn alone and where no one could see him weep with sorrow. As I comforted him in that room before going to the pulpit, he gave me a hug, and I knew a tender chord had been touched.

Time passed. Shelley and his family moved to another part of the city. I was called to preside over the Canadian Mission and, together with my family, moved to Toronto, Canada, for a three-year period.

When I returned and after I was called to the Twelve, Shelley telephoned me. He said, "Bishop, will you seal my wife, my family, and me in the Salt Lake Temple?"

I answered hesitantly, "But Shelley, you must first be baptized a member of the Church."

He laughed and responded, "Oh, I took care of that while you were in Canada. I sort of snuck up on you. There was this home teacher who called on us regularly and taught me the truths of the Church. He was a school crossing guard and helped the small children across the street each morning when they went to school and each afternoon when they went home. He asked me to help him. During the intervals when there was no child crossing, he gave me additional instruction pertaining to the Church."

I had the privilege to see this miracle with my own eyes and feel the joy with my heart and soul. The sealings were performed; a family was united. Shelley died not too long after this period. I had the privilege of speaking at his funeral services. I shall ever see, in memory's eye, the body of my friend Shelley lying in his casket, dressed in his temple clothing. I

readily admit the presence of tears—tears of gratitude, for the lost had been found.

Reasons for miraculous changes

Those who have felt the touch of the Master's hand somehow cannot explain the change which comes into their lives. There is a desire to live better, to serve faithfully, to walk humbly, and to be more like the Savior. Having received their spiritual eyesight and glimpsed the promises of eternity, they echo the words of the blind man to whom Jesus restored sight: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."⁷

How can we account for these miracles? Why the upsurge of activity in men long dormant? The poet, speaking of death, wrote, "God . . . touch'd him, and he slept."⁸ I say, speaking of this new birth, "God touched them, and they awakened."

Two fundamental reasons largely account for these changes of attitudes, of habits, of actions.

First, men have been shown their eternal possibilities and have made the decision to achieve them. They cannot really long rest content with mediocrity once excellence is within their reach.

Second, other men and women and, yes, young people have followed the admonition of the Savior and have loved their neighbors as themselves and helped to bring their neighbors' dreams to fulfillment and their ambitions to realization.

The catalyst in this process has been the principle of love.

The passage of time has not altered the capacity of the Redeemer to change men's lives. As He said to the dead Lazarus, so He says to you and to me, "Come forth."⁹ I add: Come forth from the despair of doubt. Come forth from the sorrow of sin. Come forth from the death of disbelief. Come forth to a newness of life.

As we do and direct our footsteps along the paths which Jesus walked, let us remember the testimony Jesus gave: "Be-

hold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. . . . I am the light and . . . life of the world."¹⁰ "I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father."¹¹

We must feed the hungry sheep

There are quorum members and those who should be our quorum members who require our help. John Milton wrote in his poem "Lycidas," "The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed."¹² The Lord Himself said to Ezekiel the prophet, "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that . . . feed not the flock."¹³

My brethren of the priesthood, the task is ours. Let us remember and never forget, however, that such an undertaking is not insurmountable. Miracles are everywhere to be seen when priesthood callings are magnified. When faith replaces doubt, when selfless service eliminates selfish striving, the power of God brings to pass His purposes. We are on the Lord's errand. We are entitled to the Lord's help. But we must try. From the play *Shenandoah* comes the spoken line which inspires: "If we don't try, then we don't do; and if we don't do, then why are we here?"

Let us, one and all, be doers of the word and not hearers only.¹⁴ Let us follow the example of our President, Gordon B. Hinckley, the Lord's prophet.

May we, as did the Savior's followers of old, respond to the invitation, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."¹⁵ That we may do so is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 107:99.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 58:26–28.
3. Luke 2:52.
4. Acts 10:38.
5. See "Proclamation," *Ensign*, May 1980, 52–53.
6. *Deseret Semi-Weekly News*, Oct. 29, 1889, 5.
7. John 9:25.

8. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, section 85, stanza 5, line 4.
9. John 11:43.
10. 3 Nephi 11:10–11.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 110:4.
12. “Lycidas,” line 125.
13. Ezekiel 34:2–3.
14. See James 1:22.
15. Matthew 4:19.

President Hinckley

Brethren, we remind you that the Tabernacle Choir broadcast will be from 9:30

to 10:00 tomorrow morning. The Sunday morning session will follow immediately.

We express appreciation to the men of the Tabernacle Choir and the orchestra for the beautiful music they have provided this evening.

It will now be my pleasure to address you. Following my remarks, the session will conclude with the choir singing “The Spirit of God.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder Merrill C. Oaks of the Seventy.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

My dear brethren, it is good to be with you in this very large priesthood meeting. I suppose this is the largest such gathering of priesthood ever assembled. What a contrast with the occasion described by Wilford Woodruff when all of the priesthood in all the world assembled in one room in Kirtland, Ohio, to receive instruction from the Prophet Joseph.

We have heard excellent counsel tonight, and I commend it to you.

The raging storm of pornography

As I offer concluding remarks I rather reluctantly speak to a theme that I have dealt with before. I do it in the spirit of the words of Alma, who said, “This is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance” (Alma 29:9).

It is in that spirit that I speak to you tonight. What I have to say is not new. I have spoken on it before. The September issues of the *Ensign* and *Liahona* magazines carry a talk I gave some years ago on the same subject. Brother Oaks has touched on it tonight.

While the matter of which I speak was a problem then, it is a much more serious

problem now. It grows increasingly worse. It is like a raging storm, destroying individuals and families, utterly ruining what was once wholesome and beautiful. I speak of pornography in all of its manifestations. I do so because of letters that come to me from broken-hearted wives.

Pornography strangles a marriage

I should like to read portions of one received only a few days ago. I do so with the consent of the writer. I have deleted anything that might lead to disclosure of the parties concerned. I have exercised limited editorial liberty in the interest of clarity and flow of language. I quote now:

“Dear President Hinckley,

“My husband of 35 years died recently. . . . He had visited with our good bishop as quickly as he could after his most recent surgery. Then he came to me on that same evening to tell me he had been addicted to pornography. He needed me to forgive him [before he died]. He further said that he had grown tired of living a double life. [He had served in many important] Church callings while knowing [at the same time] that he was in the grips of this ‘other master.’

"I was stunned, hurt, felt betrayed and violated. I could not promise him forgiveness at that moment but pleaded for time. . . . I was able to review my married life [and see how] pornography had . . . put a stranglehold on our marriage from early on. We had only been married a couple of months when he brought home a [pornographic] magazine. I locked him out of the car because I was so hurt and angry. . . .

"For many years in our marriage . . . he was most cruel in many of his demands. I was never good enough for him. . . . I felt incredibly beaten down at that time to a point of deep depression. . . . I know now that I was being compared to the latest 'porn queen.' . . .

"We went to counseling one time and . . . my husband proceeded to rip me apart with his criticism and disdain of me. . . .

"I could not even get into the car with him after that but walked around the town . . . for hours, contemplating suicide. [I thought,] 'Why go on if this is all that my "eternal companion" feels for me?"

"I did go on, but zipped a protective shield around myself. I existed for other reasons than my husband and found joy in my children, in projects and accomplishments that I could do totally on my own. . . .

"After his 'deathbed confession' and [after taking time] to search through my life, I [said] to him, 'Don't you know what you have done?' . . . I told him that I had brought a pure heart into our marriage, kept it pure during that marriage, and intended to keep it pure ever after. Why could he not do the same for me? All I ever wanted was to feel cherished and treated with the smallest of pleasantries . . . instead of being treated like some kind of chattel. . . .

"I am now left to grieve not only for his being gone but also for a relationship that could have been [beautiful, but was not]. . . .

"Please warn the brethren (and sisters). Pornography is not some titillating

feast for the eyes that gives a momentary rush of excitement. [Rather] it has the effect of damaging hearts and souls to their very depths, strangling the life out of relationships that should be sacred, hurting to the very core those you should love the most."

And she signs the letter.

What a pathetic and tragic story. I have omitted some of the detail but have read enough that you can sense her depth of feeling. And what of her husband? He has died a painful death from cancer, his final words a confession of a life laced with sin.

And sin it is. It is devilish. It is totally inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel, with personal testimony of the things of God, and with the life of one who has been ordained to the holy priesthood.

Prevalence, destructiveness of the material

This is not the only letter I have received. There have been enough that I am convinced this is a very serious problem even among us. It arises from many sources and expresses itself in a variety of ways. Now it is compounded by the Internet. That Internet is available not only to adults but also to young people.

I recently read that pornography has become a \$57 billion industry worldwide. Twelve billion of this is derived in the United States by evil and "conspiring men" (see D&C 89:4) who seek riches at the expense of the gullible. It is reported that it produces more revenue in the United States than the "combined revenues of all professional football, baseball and basketball franchises or the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC" ("Internet Pornography Statistics: 2003," Internet, <http://www.healthymind.com/s-port-stats.html>).

It robs the workplace of the time and talents of employees. "20% of men admit accessing pornography at work. 13% of women [do so]. . . . 10% of adults admit having internet sexual addiction" ("Inter-

net Pornography Statistics: 2003”). That is their admission, but actually the number may be much higher.

The National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families states that “approximately 40 million people in the United States are sexually involved with the Internet. . . .

“One in five children ages 10–17 [has] received a sexual solicitation over the Internet. . . .

“Three million of the visitors to adult websites in September 2000 were age 17 or younger. . . .

“Sex is the number 1 topic searched on the Internet” (NCPCF Online, “Current Statistics,” Internet, <http://www.nationalcoalition.org/resourcesservices/stat.html>).

I might go on, but you too know enough of the seriousness of the problem. Suffice it to say that all who are involved become victims. Children are exploited, and their lives are severely damaged. The minds of youth become warped with false concepts. Continued exposure leads to addiction that is almost impossible to break. Men, so very many, find they cannot leave it alone. Their energies and their interests are consumed in their dead-end pursuit of this raw and sleazy fare.

Seek the shelter of the gospel

The excuse is given that it is hard to avoid, that it is right at our fingertips and there is no escape.

Suppose a storm is raging and the winds howl and the snow swirls about you. You find yourself unable to stop it. But you can dress properly and seek shelter, and the storm will have no effect upon you.

Likewise, even though the Internet is saturated with sleazy material, you do not have to watch it. You can retreat to the shelter of the gospel and its teaching of cleanliness and virtue and purity of life.

I know that I am speaking directly and plainly. I do so because the Internet has made pornography more widely accessible, adding to what is available on DVDs and videos, on television and magazine stands. It leads to fantasies that are destructive of self-respect. It leads to illicit relationships, often to disease, and to abusive criminal activity.

Stand above this evil thing

Brethren, we can do better than this. When the Savior taught the multitude, He said, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Could anyone wish for a greater blessing than this? The high road of decency, of self-discipline, of wholesome living is the road for men, both young and old, who hold the priesthood of God. To the young men I put this question: Can you imagine John the Baptist, who restored the priesthood which you hold, being engaged in any such practice as this? To you men: Can you imagine Peter, James, and John, Apostles of our Lord, engaging in such? No, of course not.

Now brethren, the time has come for any one of us who is so involved to pull himself out of the mire, to stand above this evil thing, to “look to God and live” (Alma 37:47). We do not have to view salacious magazines. We do not have to read books laden with smut. We do not have to watch television that is beneath wholesome standards. We do not have to rent movies that depict that which is filthy. We do not have to sit at the computer and play with pornographic material found on the Internet.

I repeat, we can do better than this. We must do better than this. We are men of the priesthood. This is a most sacred and marvelous gift, worth more than all the dross of the world. But it will be amen to the effectiveness of that priesthood for anyone who engages in the practice of seeking out pornographic material.

Overcoming this enslaving addiction

If there be any within the sound of my voice who are doing so, then may you plead with the Lord out of the depths of your soul that He will remove from you the addiction which enslaves you. And may you have the courage to seek the loving guidance of your bishop and, if necessary, the counsel of caring professionals.

Let any who may be in the grip of this vise get upon their knees in the privacy of their closet and plead with the Lord for help to free them from this evil monster. Otherwise this vicious stain will continue through life and even into eternity. Jacob, the brother of Nephi, taught, “And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, inasmuch as they have become immortal, . . . they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still” (2 Nephi 9:15–16).

President Joseph F. Smith, in his vision of the Savior’s visit among the spirits of the dead, saw that “unto the wicked he did not go, and among the ungodly and the unrepentant who had defiled themselves while in the flesh, his voice was not raised” (D&C 138:20).

Walk in virtue to claim greatest promises

Now, my brethren, I do not wish to be negative. I am by nature optimistic. But in such matters as this I am a realist. If we are involved in such behavior, now is the time to change. Let this be our hour of resolution. Let us turn about to a better way. Said the Lord:

“Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.

“The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and

thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever” (D&C 121:45–46).

How could any man wish for more? These supernal blessings are promised to those who walk in virtue before the Lord and before all men.

How wonderful are the ways of our Lord. How glorious His promises. When tempted we can substitute for thoughts of evil thoughts of Him and His teachings. He has said:

“And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things.

“Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you” (D&C 88:67–68).

To you deacons and teachers and priests who are with us tonight, you wonderful young men who have to do with the sacrament, the Lord has said, “Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord” (D&C 133:5).

Priesthood power requires righteousness

To all of the priesthood the statement of revelation is clear and unequivocal: “The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and . . . the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:36).

Now I know, my brethren, that most of you are not afflicted with this evil. I ask your pardon for taking your time in dwelling on it. But if you are a stake president or a bishop, a district or branch president, you may very well have to assist those who are affected. May the Lord grant you wisdom, guidance, inspiration, and love for those who so need it.

And to all of you, young or old, who are not involved, I congratulate you and leave my blessing with you. How beautiful is the life that is patterned after the teachings of the gospel of Him who was without sin. Such a man walks with unblemished brow in the sunlight of virtue and strength.

May heaven's blessings attend you, my dear brethren. May all of us reach out

to any who need help, I pray, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "The Spirit of God."
Elder Merrill C. Oaks offered the benediction.

SUNDAY MORNING SESSION

The fourth session of the 174th Semiannual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, October 3, 2004. President Gordon B. Hinckley conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Clay Christiansen and Richard Elliott were the organists. To begin this session, the choir sang "Glory to God on High." President Hinckley then made the following remarks.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

We welcome you this morning to this, the fourth general session of the 174th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We extend our greetings to those of you who are participating by radio, television, the Internet, or satellite transmission. We are grateful to the owners and operators of the facilities who are broadcasting this conference.

We acknowledge the presence this morning of government, education, and civic leaders who are here with us.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Clay Christiansen and Richard Elliott at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing "Glory to God on High" and will

now favor us with "The Lord My Pasture Will Prepare." The invocation will then be offered by Elder E. Ray Bateman of the Seventy.

The choir sang "The Lord My Pasture Will Prepare."

Elder E. Ray Bateman offered the invocation.

President Hinckley

The choir will now sing "Love Is Spoken Here." We shall then be pleased to hear from President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency. He will be followed by Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, after which we shall hear from Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf, who was sustained yesterday as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve.

The choir and congregation will then sing "Redeemer of Israel." Following the singing, we will be pleased to hear from Elder David A. Bednar, who also was sustained yesterday as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. We shall then hear from Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir sang "Love Is Spoken Here."

President Thomas S. Monson

My dear brothers and sisters, both within my view and assembled throughout the world, I seek an interest in your faith and prayers as I respond to the assignment and privilege to address you. First, however, I should like to extend a personal welcome to Elders Dieter Uchtdorf and David Bednar, our new members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Choose you this day

I have been thinking recently about choices and their consequences. It has been said that the gate of history turns on small hinges, and so do people's lives. The choices we make determine our destiny.

Joshua of old declared, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."¹

All of us commenced an awesome and vital journey when we left the spirit world and entered this often challenging stage called mortality. We brought with us that great gift from God—our agency. Said the prophet Wilford Woodruff:

"God has given unto all of His children . . . individual agency. . . . [We] possessed it in the heaven of heavens before the world was, and the Lord maintained and defended it there against the aggression of Lucifer. . . . By virtue of this agency you and I and all mankind are made responsible beings, responsible for the course we pursue, the lives we live, the deeds we do."²

Brigham Young said, "All must use [this agency] in order to gain exaltation in [God's] kingdom; inasmuch as [we] have the power of choice [we] must exercise that power."³

The scriptures tell us that we are free to act for ourselves, "to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life."⁴

A familiar hymn provides inspiration in the choices we make:

Choose the right when a choice is
placed before you.
In the right the Holy Spirit guides;
And its light is forever shining o'er
you,
When in the right your heart
confides. . . .

Choose the right! There is peace in
righteous doing.
Choose the right! There's safety for
the soul.
Choose the right in all labors you're
pursuing;
Let God and heaven be your goal.⁵

Guides to help us make correct choices

Do we have a guide to help us choose the right and avoid dangerous detours? Positioned on the wall of my office, directly opposite my desk, is a lovely print of the Savior, painted by Heinrich Hofmann. I love the painting, which I have had since I was a 22-year-old bishop and which I have taken with me wherever I have been assigned to labor. I have tried to pattern my life after the Master. Whenever I have a difficult decision to make, I have looked at that picture and asked myself, "What would He do?" Then I try to do it. We can never go wrong when we choose to follow the Savior.

Some choices may seem more important than others, but no choice is insignificant.

Some years ago I held in my hand a guide which, if followed, will never fail in helping us to make correct choices. It was a volume of scripture we commonly call the triple combination, containing the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. This book was a gift from a loving father to a pre-

cious daughter who followed carefully his advice. On the flyleaf page, her father had written in his own hand these inspired words:

“To my dear Maurine,

“That you may have a constant measure by which to judge between truth and the errors of man’s philosophies, and thus grow in spirituality as you increase in knowledge, I give you this sacred book to read frequently and cherish throughout your life.

“Lovingly your father,

“Harold B. Lee”

Staying on the path to our eternal destiny

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, our goal is to obtain celestial glory.

Let us not find ourselves as indecisive as is Alice in Lewis Carroll’s classic *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. You will remember that she comes to a crossroads with two paths before her, each stretching onward but in opposite directions. She is confronted by the Cheshire cat, of whom Alice asks, “Which path shall I follow?”

The cat answers: “That depends where you want to go. If you do not know where you want to go, it doesn’t matter which path you take.”⁶

Unlike Alice, we all know where we want to go, and it *does* matter which way we go, for the path we follow in this life surely leads to the path we will follow in the next.

Each of us should remember that he or she is a son or daughter of God, endowed with faith, gifted with courage, and guided by prayer. Our eternal destiny is before us. The Apostle Paul speaks to us today as he spoke to Timothy long years ago: “Neglect not the gift that is in thee.” “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.”⁷

At times many of us let that enemy of achievement—even the culprit “self-defeat”—dwarf our aspirations, smother

our dreams, cloud our vision, and impair our lives. The enemy’s voice whispers in our ears, “You can’t do it.” “You’re too young.” “You’re too old.” “You’re nobody.” This is when we remember that we are created in the image of God. Reflection on this truth provides a profound sense of strength and power.

Seeking heavenly help

Mine was the privilege to know rather intimately President J. Reuben Clark Jr., who served for so many years as a member of the First Presidency. As I assisted him in the preparation for printing his monumental books, priceless lessons were learned. One day while in a somber, reflective mood, President Clark asked if I could arrange for the printing of a picture suitable for framing. The picture was to feature the lions of Persepolis guarding the ruins of a crumbled glory. President Clark wished to have printed with the picture—between the decaying arches of a civilization that was no more—a number of his favorite scriptures, chosen from his vast knowledge of holy writ. I felt you would wish to know his selections. There were three—two from Ecclesiastes and one from the Gospel of John.

First, from Ecclesiastes: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”⁸

Second, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”⁹

Third, from John: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”¹⁰

An earlier prophet, even Moroni, writing in what is now the Book of Mormon, counseled, “And now, I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever.”¹¹

President David O. McKay counseled: “The greatest battle of life is fought within the silent chambers of your own soul.” . . . It is a good thing to sit down and commune with yourself, to come to an understanding with yourself and decide in that silent moment what your duty is to your family, to your Church, to your country, and . . . to your fellowmen.”¹²

The boy prophet Joseph Smith sought heavenly help by entering a grove which then became sacred. Do we need similar strength? Does each need to seek his or her own “Sacred Grove”? A place where communication between God and man can go forth unimpeded, uninterrupted, and undisturbed is such a grove.

Choosing to follow the Savior

In the New Testament we learn that it is impossible to take a right attitude toward Christ without taking an unselfish attitude toward men. In the book of Matthew, Jesus taught, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”¹³

When the Savior sought a man of faith, He did not select him from the throng of self-righteous who were found regularly in the synagogue. Rather, He called him from among the fishermen of Capernaum. While teaching on the seashore, He saw two ships standing by the lake. He entered one and asked its owner to put it out a little from the land so He might not be pressed upon by the crowd. After teaching further, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets.” Simon answered:

“Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

“And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes. . . .

“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”¹⁴

Came the reply, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”¹⁵

Simon the fisherman had received his call. Doubting, disbelieving, unschooled, untrained, impetuous Simon did not find the way of the Lord a highway of ease nor a path free from pain. He was to hear the rebuke, “O thou of little faith.”¹⁶ Yet when the Master asked him, “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹⁷

Simon, man of doubt, had become Peter, Apostle of faith. Peter made his choice.

When the Savior was to choose a missionary of zeal and power, He found him not among His advocates but amidst His adversaries. The experience of Damascus’s way changed Saul. Of him the Lord declared, “He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”¹⁸

Saul the persecutor became Paul the proselyter. Paul made his choice.

Service of a stalwart grandson

Acts of selfless service are performed daily by countless members of the Church. There are many which are freely given, with no fanfare or boasting, but rather through quiet love and tender care. Let me share with you the example of one who made such a simple yet profound choice to serve.

A few years ago, Sister Monson and I were in the city of Toronto, where we once lived when I was the mission president. Olive Davies, the wife of the first stake president in Toronto, was gravely ill and preparing to pass from this life. Her illness required her to leave her cherished home and enter a hospital which could provide the care she needed. Her only child lived with her own family far away in the West.

I attempted to comfort Sister Davies, but she had present with her the comfort she longed to have. A stalwart grandson sat silently next to his grandmother. I

learned he had spent most of the summer away from his university studies, that he might serve his grandmother's needs. I said to him, "Shawn, you will never regret your decision. Your grandmother feels you are heaven-sent, an answer to her prayers."

He replied, "I chose to come because I love her and know this is what my Heavenly Father would have me do."

Tears were near the surface. Grandmother told us how she enjoyed being helped by her grandson and introducing him to each employee and every patient in the hospital. Hand in hand, they walked the halls, and during the night he was close by.

Olive Davies has passed on to her reward, there to meet her faithful husband and together continue an eternal journey. In a grandson's heart there will ever remain those words, "Choose the right when a choice is placed before you. In the right the Holy Spirit guides."¹⁹

Such are foundation stones in building one's personal temple. As the Apostle Paul counseled, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"²⁰

A simple formula

May I leave with you today a simple yet far-reaching formula to guide you in the choices of life:

Fill your minds with truth.
Fill your hearts with love.
Fill your lives with service.

By doing so, may we one day hear the plaudit from our Lord and Savior, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."²¹

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Joshua 24:15.
2. *Deseret Weekly*, Sept. 21, 1889, 393.
3. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 54.
4. 2 Nephi 10:23.
5. "Choose the Right," *Hymns*, no. 239.
6. Adapted from Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1992), 76.
7. 1 Timothy 4:14; 6:20.
8. Ecclesiastes 12:13.
9. Ecclesiastes 1:2.
10. John 17:3.
11. Ether 12:41.
12. In Conference Report, Apr. 1967, 84–85; or *Improvement Era*, June 1967, 80.
13. Matthew 25:40.
14. Luke 5:4–6, 8.
15. Matthew 4:19.
16. Matthew 14:31.
17. Matthew 16:15, 16.
18. Acts 9:15.
19. *Hymns*, no. 239.
20. 1 Corinthians 3:16.
21. Matthew 25:23.

Elder Robert D. Hales

Finding faith in Jesus Christ

I too would like to express our love and the thoughts and prayers that we had this morning in our family for Elder Uchtdorf and Elder Bednar. We look forward to their association and to hearing their faith and their testimony.

Believing in the Savior and His mission is so essential that it is the first principle of the gospel: "Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."¹ What is faith? In his epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul taught that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence

of things not seen.”² And how do we gain faith? How do we gain evidence of our Savior, whom we have not seen? The scriptures teach us:

“To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to *know* that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.

“To others it is given to *believe* on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.”³

From the beginning of time, prophets have *known* that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, of His mortal mission, and of His Atonement for all mankind. Sacred records give the prophecies of thousands of years, not only of the first coming of our Savior but also of the *Second Coming*—a glorious day that will most assuredly come.

If we had lived in the days of these prophets of old, would we have believed on their words? Would we have had faith in the coming of our Savior?

Responses to Samuel’s prophecies

In ancient America, Samuel the Lamanite prophesied that on the night of the Savior’s birth “there [would] be great lights in heaven, . . . insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day.”⁴

Many believed Samuel and went to find Nephi, confessed their sins, repented, and were baptized. “And angels did appear unto [them], and did declare unto them glad tidings of great joy.”⁵

But for the most part, the Nephites “harden[ed] their hearts”⁶ and became blind to the “signs and wonders” of the times. These signs were given so that the people “might know that the Christ must shortly come.”⁷ But instead of heeding them, the Nephites depended “upon their own . . . wisdom, saying: Some things [the believers] may have guessed right, [but] it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come.”⁸

In those days as in ours, some naysayers, called anti-Christ, convinced others

that there was no need for a Savior and His Atonement. When Samuel’s prophecy was finally fulfilled and there was a “day and a night and a day, as if it were one day,”⁹ what joy must have filled the hearts of those who had believed in the prophets! “It had come to pass, yea, all things, every whit, according to the words of the prophets. And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word.”¹⁰

Tests of faith for believers

Those who believed the words of the prophets recognized the Savior throughout His life and ministry and were blessed to follow Him. But sometimes the faith of even the most devoted followers was tested. After the Crucifixion, Thomas heard his brethren testify that the Savior had risen from the tomb. But instead of believing their words, Thomas declared, “Except I shall see . . . , I will not believe.”¹¹ Later this beloved Apostle was given the opportunity to touch the prints of the nails in the Savior’s hands and confessed, “My Lord and my God.”¹² The Savior then lovingly taught him as He has taught all of us what it means to have faith: “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”¹³

Believers on the American continent faced similar tests of faith. As Samuel had prophesied, there were great “thunderings and lightnings,”¹⁴ and darkness covered “the whole earth for the space of three days.”¹⁵ But those who had “received the prophets and stoned them not”¹⁶ did not fear or flee. They recognized this was “the sign [that] had been given concerning [the Savior’s] death”¹⁷ and gathered to the temple, marveling together. And there He appeared to them, saying:

“Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

“. . . I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and

have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world. . . .

“And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven.”¹⁸

Believe prophets’ words about Christ

Brothers and sisters, the prophecies of Christ’s *first* coming were fulfilled, “every whit.” As a result, many throughout the world believe that the Savior did come and did live in the meridian of time. But there are still many prophecies yet to be fulfilled! In this and other conferences, we hear living prophets prophesy and testify of Christ’s *Second* Coming. They also witness of the signs and wonders all about us, telling us that Christ will surely come again. Are we choosing to believe their words? Or despite their witnesses and warnings, are we waiting for evidence—are we “walking in darkness at noon-day,”¹⁹ refusing to see by the light of modern prophecy, and denying that the Light of the World will return to rule and reign among us?

Throughout the course of my life, I have known many good and generous people who adhere to Christian values. However, some lack faith that He lives, that He is the Savior of the world, and that His Church has been restored to the earth. Because they do not believe in the words of the prophets, they miss the joy of the gospel and its saving ordinances in their lives.

How to develop the beginnings of faith

I have a dear friend who, one day not long ago in a moment of brotherly tenderness, asked, “Elder Hales, I want to believe. I’ve always wanted to believe, but how do I do it?” This morning I desire to answer that question.

Hear and act on the word of God

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”²⁰ The very fact that you are viewing, listening to, or reading the proceedings of this conference means that you are hearing God’s word. The first step to finding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is to let His word—spoken by the mouth of His servants, the prophets—touch your heart. But it is not enough merely to let those words wash over you, as if they alone could transform you. We must do our part. Or as the Savior Himself said, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”²¹ In other words, hearing requires an active effort. “Faith without works is dead.”²² It means taking seriously what is taught, considering it carefully, studying it out in our minds. As the prophet Enos learned, it means letting others’ testimonies of the gospel “[sink] deep into [our] heart[s].”²³

Elements in the building of Enos’s faith

Let us review some of the elements of Enos’s profound, faith-building experience:

First, Enos heard the gospel truths from his father, just as you are hearing them in your families and in this conference.

Second, he let his father’s teachings about “eternal life, and the joy of the saints”²⁴ sink deep into his heart.

Third, he was filled with a desire to know for himself whether these teachings were true and where he himself stood before his Maker. To use Enos’s words, “My soul hungered.”²⁵ By this intense spiritual appetite, Enos qualified himself to receive the Savior’s promise: “Blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.”²⁶

Fourth, Enos obeyed the commandments of God, which enabled him to be receptive to the Spirit of the Holy Ghost.

Fifth, Enos records, "I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens."²⁷ It wasn't easy. Faith did not come quickly. In fact, Enos characterized his experience in prayer as a "wrestle which [he] had before God."²⁸ But faith did come. By the power of the Holy Ghost, he did receive a witness for himself.

Cry to God in mighty prayer

We cannot find Enos-like faith without our own wrestle before God in prayer. I testify that the reward is worth the effort. Remember the pattern: (1) hear the word of God, spoken and written by His servants; (2) let that word sink deep into your heart; (3) hunger in your soul for righteousness; (4) obediently follow gospel laws, ordinances, and covenants; and (5) raise your voice in mighty prayer and supplication, asking in faith to know that Jesus Christ is our Savior. I promise that if you do these things sincerely and unceasingly, the words Christ spoke to His disciples will be fulfilled in your life: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."²⁹

Faith can't be measured by an extra day

Once we find the beginnings of our faith in Jesus, our Heavenly Father allows our faith to be strengthened. This occurs in many ways, including through the experience of adversity. An acquaintance of mine recently wrote:

"We lost a 2½-year-old grandson to leukemia. . . . My children still haven't

taken his crib down; it will [soon be] 7 years [since he died. It is] hard to have faith. [I] lost a friend [who was] 69. [He] had three different cancers in 10 years, [cancers which] went into remission twice. [First, they found it in his] kidneys, [then his] brain, [and] then [his] lungs. [He] couldn't fight it any longer. [He] tried everything humanly possible and 6 years ago found faith . . . but not an extra day, so I guess it's hard to believe."

This appeal to me for faith was answered as follows: "Your family story of the loss of your grandson to leukemia was touching. Hopefully, you and your children will find peace as you seek answers to the purpose of life. Our faith is acquired through prayer with a sincere desire to draw close to God and trust in Him to bear our burdens and give us answers to life's unexplained mysteries of the purpose of life: Where did we come from? Why are we here on earth in mortality? And where are we going after our mortal sojourn on earth? All is well with your little one because he died before the age of accountability of eight years of age and he is in the presence of God. Seek faith, and may the blessings of God be with you."

Isn't it interesting that the one who is suffering often gains faith through suffering and accepts the Lord's will, "thy will be done,"³⁰ while family members and caregivers may have a difficult time accepting the tragic outcome and being able to strengthen their faith from the experience. We cannot measure faith by "an extra day."

Atonement brings strength during trials

When the challenges of mortality come, and they come for all of us, it may seem hard to have faith and hard to believe. At these times only faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement can bring us peace, hope, and understanding. Only

faith that He suffered for our sakes will give us the strength to endure to the end. When we gain this faith, we experience a mighty change of heart, and like Enos, we become stronger and begin to feel a desire for the welfare of our brothers and sisters. We pray for them, that they too will be lifted and strengthened through faith on the Atonement of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Let us consider a few of these prophetic witnesses of the effects of the Atonement in our lives. As we do I invite you to let them sink deep into your heart and fill whatever hunger and thirsting there may be in your soul.

“And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, . . . that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed.”³¹

And “the Lord showed himself unto [the brother of Jared], and said: . . . Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. . . . In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name.”³²

Abinadi witnessed: “I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. . . . Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain . . . ; giving [him] power to make intercession for the children of men . . . , having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice.”³³

And finally, Joseph Smith. As a 14-year-old boy, he exercised unwavering faith and followed the prophet James’s direction to “ask of God.”³⁴ Because of Joseph’s prophetic calling, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to him and gave him instructions. How glorious was this First Vision to the first prophet of this last dispensation! Sixteen years later in the Kirtland Temple, Joseph

was visited again by the Savior and testified:

“We saw the Lord. . . . And his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying: I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father.”³⁵

Satisfy hunger for faith by seeking Jesus

To my dear friend and all those whose souls are hungering for faith, I invite you “to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written.”³⁶ Let their witness that the Savior gave His life for you sink deep into your heart. Seek a witness of the truth through the Holy Ghost in prayer, and then see your faith strengthened as you joyfully meet the challenges of this mortal life and prepare for eternal life.

Jesus Christ did come. He did live. And He will come again. This I know and give my special witness and testimony, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Articles of Faith 1:4.
2. Hebrews 11:1.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 46:13–14; italics added.
4. Helaman 14:3.
5. Helaman 16:14.
6. Helaman 16:15.
7. Helaman 16:4.
8. Helaman 16:15–16, 18.
9. Helaman 14:4.
10. 3 Nephi 1:20–21.
11. John 20:25.
12. John 20:28.
13. John 20:29.
14. Helaman 14:21.
15. Helaman 14:27.
16. 3 Nephi 10:12.
17. 3 Nephi 11:2.
18. 3 Nephi 11:10–12.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 95:6.
20. Romans 10:17.

- 21. Matthew 11:15.
- 22. James 2:26.
- 23. Enos 1:3.
- 24. Enos 1:3.
- 25. Enos 1:4.
- 26. 3 Nephi 12:6.
- 27. Enos 1:4.
- 28. Enos 1:2.

- 29. Matthew 7:7.
- 30. Matthew 26:42.
- 31. Moses 5:9.
- 32. Ether 3:13–14.
- 33. Mosiah 15:1, 7–9.
- 34. James 1:5.
- 35. Doctrine and Covenants 110:2–4.
- 36. Ether 12:41.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Feelings as a newly called Apostle

My dear brothers and sisters, here in Salt Lake City and around the world, it is good to be with you. I extend my love and my greetings to Elder Bednar and Elder Robert Oaks in their new callings. To describe my inner feelings, I would say I am calm as a hurricane, or even better, I am happy and frightened. In one sentence, I need your prayers; I need the Lord.

Having received a call and been given a sacred trust that will completely influence my life forever, my feelings are tender and my emotions often close to tears. I have a great sense of inadequacy, and I have felt a sweet agony from a deep and often painful examination of my soul during the many hours which have passed day and night since Friday morning this week.

Expressions of love and gratitude

After President Gordon B. Hinckley extended the call to me to become an Apostle and a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, I left my busy office to share this totally unexpected news with my beloved Harriet. At this most important time in our lives, we have cherished the quiet sacredness of our home as a place of refuge and of defense. How grateful I am for my wife, for the loving comfort and strong support she has been throughout my life. Next to the gift of life itself and the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, Harriet is

the greatest blessing which has come into my life.

I wish to express my deep love and appreciation to our children and our grandchildren for their prayers and love, but most of all for their example. Our children and grandchildren live in Germany and are building the kingdom of God in our homeland. The joys of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its eternal blessings bridge over the distance of many thousands of miles and bring happiness and comfort into our lives.

I express my gratitude and love to each member of our family and to a large number of friends and teachers along the way who teach and serve and lift to make us who we are.

I express my deepest feelings of love and gratitude to the members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve for their love and kindness. In the closing of my stewardship as one of the seven Presidents of the Seventy, I want to express my love and admiration to the Seventy. They are truly especial witnesses of Christ. Instead of any others they are the men the Twelve call upon when they need assistance. I give thanks to those dedicated men who are giving so much of their time, talents, and spiritual power to build the kingdom. Words cannot describe how I love the 10½ years I had the privilege and joy to serve as a Seventy. I will cherish the example and friendship of the members of the Quorums of the Seventy forever.

I want to thank each and every member of the Church throughout the world for your faithfulness despite temptations; for your love; for your dedication to the principles and doctrine of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ; for your willingness to follow the living prophet in making the wards and branches grow; for your sacrifices in giving of your time and energy and your emotional, spiritual, and temporal substance. Thank you for paying an honest tithing and not neglecting the poor and the lonely. I have seen the face of Christ in your faces, in your deeds, and in your exemplary lives. You are a modern miracle.

Every calling is important

I thank you for sustaining, with your hand and with your heart, the general officers of the Church. Yesterday we sustained the general leadership of the Church according to the principle of common consent. Not one of these Church leaders is seeking such a position, nor are they declining such a call, because they know it comes by revelation from God.

We are grateful for your prayers, and we pray for you. We love you, and we need your love. We sustain you, and we need your willingness to serve the Lord wherever you are and to whatever position you are called. In the Lord's Church, every calling is important.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said: "We are here to assist our Father in His work and His glory, 'to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man' (Moses 1:39). Your obligation is as serious in your sphere of responsibility as is my obligation in my sphere" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 94; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 71). And the President asked us to reach out to others and bless the lives of those around us. He said: "Let there be cultivated an awareness in every member's heart of his own potential for bringing others to a knowledge of the truth. . . . Let him pray with great earnestness about it"

("Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep," *Ensign*, May 1999, 106).

Story of grandmother's conversion

My life was eternally blessed by one choice member who reached out more than 50 years ago. Some days after World War II, my grandmother was standing in line for food when an elderly single sister with no family of her own invited her to sacrament meeting in Zwickau, East Germany. My grandmother and my parents accepted the invitation. They went to church, felt the Spirit, were uplifted by the kindness of the members, and were edified by the hymns of the Restoration. My grandmother, my parents, and my three siblings were all baptized. I had to wait two years because I was only six.

How grateful I am for a spiritually sensitive grandmother, teachable parents, and a wise, white-haired, elderly single sister who had the sweet boldness to reach out and follow the Savior's example by inviting us to "come and see" (see John 1:39). Her name was Sister Ewig, which translates in English to "Sister Eternal." I will be eternally grateful for her love and example.

Joy for the opportunity to testify

With these tender feelings of gratitude for all who have influenced my life in past years, I commit myself to the future. My heart and mind are filled with joy that for the rest of my life I will have the opportunity to "talk of Christ, . . . rejoice in Christ, . . . preach of Christ, [and] prophesy of Christ" (2 Nephi 25:26), all this as a special witness of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ (see D&C 107:23).

Realizing my weaknesses, I gain great comfort from the instructions given by the Lord. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

"The fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple

unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers. . . .

“And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed; . . .

“And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge” (D&C 1:23, 26, 28).

And in the Book of Mormon we read:

“I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments . . . save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7).

And in the Old Testament we receive comfort:

“The Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt . . . be turned into another man,” “God gave him another heart,” and “God is with thee” (1 Samuel 10:6, 9, 7).

I trust these wonderful promises. I therefore pledge to you, to these my Brethren, and to the Lord that I will live to be worthy to know the will of the Lord and to act accordingly.

These things I know

God our Heavenly Father knows us by name. Jesus Christ lives; He is the Messiah; He loves us. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is real; it brings immortality to all and opens the door to eternal life.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is again on the earth. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true and living.

The Book of Mormon is a second witness of Jesus Christ and a manifestation of the truthfulness of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I love the Prophet Joseph. I love President Gordon B. Hinckley, who is the prophet of God and who holds all the keys of the kingdom at this time—keys which prophets have held in uninterrupted succession since Joseph Smith.

These things I know in my heart and in my mind. And of these things I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir and congregation sang
“Redeemer of Israel.”

Elder David A. Bednar

Feelings as a newly called Apostle

Brothers and sisters, my heart is filled to overflowing, my mind is spinning, my knees are weak and wobbly, and I find that words are totally inadequate to communicate effectively the feelings and thoughts I desire to share with you. I pray for and invite the companionship of the Holy Ghost for me and for you as I speak with you briefly this Sabbath morning.

In the hours since President Hinckley extended this new call to serve, I have heeded the admonition of Nephi to “liken all scriptures unto us” (1 Nephi 19:23) with a greater sense of purpose and intensity than I have ever done before.

I have reflected on the teaching of Paul that “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:27). This morning I take great comfort in knowing that I am one of the truly weak things of the world.

Enabling, strengthening power of grace

I have pondered the instruction of Jacob as contained in the Book of Mormon:

“Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the

spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea.

“Nevertheless, the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things” (Jacob 4:6–7).

Brothers and sisters, please pay particular attention to the word *grace* as it is used in the verse I just read. In the Bible Dictionary we learn that the word *grace* frequently is used in the scriptures to denote a strengthening or enabling power:

“The main idea of the word is divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ.

“... It is likewise through the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts” (p. 697).

Thus, the enabling and strengthening aspect of the Atonement helps us to see and to do and to become good in ways that we could never recognize or accomplish with our limited mortal capacity. I testify and witness that the enabling power of the Savior’s Atonement is real. Without that strengthening power of the Atonement, I could not stand before you this morning.

In the strength of the Lord

Can we sense the grace and strengthening power of Christ in the testimony of Ammon? “Yea, I know that I am nothing;

as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever” (Alma 26:12). Truly, brothers and sisters, in the strength of the Lord we can do and endure and overcome all things.

As I walked out of the Church Administration Building after my interview with President Hinckley on Friday afternoon, I recalled the words of Enoch:

“And when Enoch had heard these words, he bowed himself to the earth, before the Lord, and spake before the Lord, saying: Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?

“And the Lord said unto Enoch: Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance, for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good” (Moses 6:31–32).

For all of us who feel unprepared and overwhelmed and unequal to a new calling or responsibility, the promise of the Lord to Enoch is equally applicable. The promise was true in Enoch’s day, and it is true today.

Help from heaven at BYU–Idaho

On the night of June 20, 2000, several colleagues and I were working late in the executive offices of then Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho. We were making final preparations for an unexpected and historic assembly on our campus the next morning and the announcement by President Hinckley that Ricks College would become a baccalaureate-degree-granting institution and take on the name of Brigham Young University–Idaho. As an administrative team we were just beginning

to realize the monumental nature of the responsibility and challenges that were before us.

As we walked out of the building that night, one of my colleagues asked, "President, are you scared?" As best as I can recall, I answered something like this: "If I thought we had to execute this transition relying exclusively upon our own experience and our own judgment, then I would be terrified. But we will have help from heaven. Because we know who is in charge and that we are not alone, then no, I am not scared." And we who serve at BYU–Idaho unitedly testify that there has been help from heaven, miracles have occurred, revelations have been received, doors have been opened, and we have been greatly blessed as individuals and as an institution.

Expressions of gratitude

Please permit me now to express gratitude and appreciation. I am thankful for my progenitors—for those faithful and steady men and women whom I respect and honor and to whom I owe everything. I love and appreciate my mother and father and my wife's mother and father. I am grateful for their love and support and teaching and strength.

My wife, Susan, is a virtuous woman and a righteous mother. You will quickly see that purity and goodness are evident in her countenance. I love her and appreciate her more than words can express. I thank her for the woman she is, for the lessons she has taught me, and for the love we share.

Susan and I have been blessed with three stalwart sons. I love and thank them. And our growing little family now includes two righteous daughters-in-law and three brilliant and beautiful and charming granddaughters. As we have opportunities to be together, we are blessed to see just a glimpse of the family unit in eternity.

My dear brothers and sisters, I am grateful for you. As I see you assembled here in the Conference Center and envision you in meetinghouses all over the earth, I am blessed by your faithfulness and devotion to the Savior. As your arms were raised to the square on Saturday, I felt a sustaining influence flow into my soul that was most remarkable. Few of you know who I am, yet you know from whom the call has come, and you are so willing to sustain and support. I express my thanks to you and pledge my whole soul and all of my energy to this sacred work.

I will go where the Lord and the leaders of His Church want me to go, I will do what they want me to do, I will teach what they want me to teach, and I will strive to become what I should and must become. In the strength of the Lord and through His grace, I know that you and I can be blessed to accomplish all things.

Of these things I testify

As one of the weakest of the weak, I testify that God lives. I testify and witness that Jesus is the Christ. He is our Redeemer and our Savior, and He lives. And I testify that the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His true Church have been restored to the earth in these latter days through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Priesthood keys and authority and saving ordinances are again found on the earth. By the power of that priesthood, families truly can be together forever. The Book of Mormon is the word of God and the keystone of our religion. And, brothers and sisters, the heavens are not closed. God speaks—to us individually and to the leaders of His latter-day kingdom on earth. President Gordon B. Hinckley is the Lord's prophet on the earth today. Of these things I testify and declare my witness in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Gratitude for senior missionaries

Gratefully we welcome Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf and Elder David A. Bednar to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Prayerfully and unitedly we will serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Assignments this year have taken me to many nations of the earth. In some of those countries the Church is relatively new. No matter where I go, I meet our missionaries. They are remarkably resilient and ever effective. They give visible and tangible evidence that the Church of Jesus Christ has been restored in its fullness. It was He who said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”¹ This commandment throbs in the heart of every missionary who testifies of Jesus Christ and teaches His message.

When we think of missionaries, we generally picture in our minds young men with shirts and ties and young women dressed modestly. But along with them are marvelous senior missionaries who have answered the pleadings of prophets and apostles for more missionary couples.²

I express gratitude for our senior missionaries. They are young in spirit, wise, and willing to work. They even tolerate remarks from their fun-filled children who might change President Spencer W. Kimball’s plea “Lengthen your stride” to “Hasten your shuffle.”³ These dear members are willing to serve and strengthen the lives of others.⁴ Even if these seniors don’t know the local language, their accomplishments are great and their spirit of sacrifice is precious.⁵

Examples of senior missionary service

Lloyd and Catherine Poelman

For example, I think of Elder Lloyd Poelman and his wife, Sister Catherine Poelman. Parents of 9 grown children and

grandparents of 20 grandchildren, they now serve in a remote part of Chile, working in a small branch. They make frequent visits among less-active members and with families recently converted to the Church. These visits provide opportunity for the Poelmans to read with those families and bear testimony of temple blessings. In their mission branches they have also taught people how to conduct music and play simplified versions of the hymns on small electronic keyboards. Elder and Sister Poelman recently wrote:

“Baptism is only the first step in conversion. When the initial excitement subsides and the new converts continue facing the need to work long hours just to put bread on the table, they need others to help them who share the joy of the gospel. That is our specialty. Part of our work is preventive—staying close to new converts. Yet others who rarely attend meetings have not lost conviction and receive our messages gratefully. As we watch the changes brought about in the lives of those we visit, we feel blessed to be receiving constant tutoring and help from the Lord in this work and, at the same time, to know that our family members back home are vicariously sharing our calling and those special blessings.”⁶

Such marvelous couples are engaged in the work of reclaiming souls who have previously made covenants to take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ.

Kenneth and Barbara Willits

Other missionary couples render service in sacred temples of the Church. Elder Kenneth and Sister Barbara Willits, for instance, serve in the Accra Ghana Temple. They developed a special love for the people of Ghana while serving there as missionaries more than two decades earlier. They are energetic and enthusias-

tic converts of 50 years, with 3 children, 16 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren. They perform the exalting ordinances of the temple. Brother Willits serves as a sealer.

On several occasions they have been pleasantly surprised to meet members whom they had previously encountered during their first mission. Recently Elder Willits performed the sealing of a husband and wife whom they had taught in 1982, and to that couple Elder Willits sealed four of their deceased children. Elder and Sister Willits write:

“Our willingness to leave our family and home is motivated by the temple covenants we have made, and our deepest desire is to become an eternal family. Our family is fully supportive as we serve, and they share in many blessings we have received. We are humbly grateful for the privilege of assisting others to receive their temple blessings.”⁷

Courageous and caring couples like Elder and Sister Willits enable and enrich the work done in many of our temples across the earth. Some, such as the Accra Ghana Temple, are located where most local members had not had previous opportunities to attend a temple. Ordinances for those members are now enhanced by experienced couples who serve as temple missionaries. To them we also express our heartfelt gratitude.

Rudi and Eva Hegewald

Earlier this year Elder Douglas L. Calister and I were in Kiev, capital city of Ukraine. We were there to create the first stake in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. We were pleased to note that the Kiev Ukraine District was well prepared to become a stake—fully organized and ready to take its place among the stakes of Zion. There we also met with the missionaries, among whom were several stalwart senior couples. We listened attentively to their expressions.

We remember the account of Elder Rudi and Sister Eva Hegewald, who grew up in what was then known as East Germany. Speaking with a slight and sweet German accent, they recounted the difficult days of World War II and the subsequent Soviet occupation. They spoke of their many deprivations. Finding the Lord’s true Church and later immigrating to America were counted as treasured blessings. The ensuing years brought them five healthy children, along with spiritual and financial increase. They felt that serving a mission would be a good way for them to show gratitude to the Lord. They expressed a deep desire to serve in Eastern Europe. Their call came to serve in the Ukraine Kiev Mission. Elder and Sister Hegewald write:

“Now, close to the end of our mission in the land of our former enemy, we are thankful for the opportunity to teach and love the Ukrainian people. As we have served the Lord, our souls have been healed and our family has become more united. We have had a truly remarkable and satisfying experience and have seen many small miracles.”⁸

A call for more senior missionary couples

Notice that all three couples wrote of their blessings. Another couple tells of blessings that come from missionary service. They wrote: “Good people replaced our parenting functions better than we. . . . If a family problem has not yielded to prayer and fasting, a mission might be considered.”⁹

No senior missionary finds it convenient to leave. Neither did Joseph or Brigham or John or Wilford. They had children and grandchildren too. They loved their families not one whit less, but they also loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him. Someday we may meet these stalwarts who helped to establish this dispensation. Then will we rejoice that we did not seek the shadows when a call to missionary service

came from the prophet, even in the autumn years of our lives.

At general conference in October 1925, President Heber J. Grant issued a clarion call for “men of mature years and sound judgment, who have had experience in the preaching of the gospel, . . . to go forth and labor in the mission fields.”¹⁰

That need persists. At the most recent training broadcast to priesthood leaders throughout the world, President Gordon B. Hinckley issued a similar call:

“There is a constant need for more couple missionaries,” he said. “They perform wonderful service throughout the world. You [leaders] need not wait for the couples to volunteer. The sacrifices associated with serving the Lord full-time will abundantly bless the couples, their families, and the people they serve.”¹¹

Qualifications for the work

Bishops also need to heed that prophetic call and ask such members if they could serve. Opportunities for senior missionaries are varied and vast.¹² Their calls to serve are officially made after prayerful consideration has been given to their occupational background, language experience, and personal capabilities.¹³ Of all qualifications to serve, a *desire* to serve may be the most important. The Lord has declared:

“O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day.

“Therefore, if ye have *desires* to serve God ye are called to the work.”¹⁴

Many humble Latter-day Saints fear that they are not qualified for missionary labors. But to such a prospective missionary, the Lord has given this assurance: “Faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the work.”¹⁵

Limitations imposed by age and health

As I extol the work of senior missionaries, I realize that there are many more who would like to serve but are not able to do so. Limitations imposed by age or by poor health deserve realistic appraisal, as do the important needs of family members. When desire burns within yet such limitations exist, you can extend your service through others. They can be your arms and legs, and you can provide needed funds. Still others can contribute time and talents as live-at-home missionaries.¹⁶ Each will be pleasing to the Lord, and each will receive His praise.

The gospel

All of us may preach the gospel by precept and example. The word *gospel* means “good news.” The good news is the Lord Jesus Christ and His message of salvation.¹⁷ Jesus equated the gospel with both His mission and with His ministry in mortality. In His *mission* statement, Jesus said:

“This is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

“And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross.”¹⁸

The Savior’s mortal mission we know as the *Atonement*.

The Savior’s mortal *ministry* includes everything else that He did—His teachings, expressions of love, attention to ordinances, patterns of prayer, perseverance, and more. He lived to be our Exemplar, which He also equated to the gospel in His ministerial statement. “This is my gospel,” He said, “for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do.”¹⁹ Thus, faith; repentance; baptism by water, fire, and of the Holy Ghost; the gathering of the elect; and enduring to the end are all part of the gospel.²⁰ All of us can emulate the Lord’s

example, regardless of age, status, or location.

As one among the “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world,”²¹ I declare that He is the Son of the living God, our atoning Savior and Redeemer. This is His Church, restored in these latter days to fulfill its divine destiny. His prophet today is President Gordon B. Hinckley. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Mark 16:15; see also Matthew 28:19; Mormon 9:22; Doctrine and Covenants 42:58; 68:8; 80:1; 84:62; 112:28.
2. For example, see Gordon B. Hinckley, “There Must Be Messengers,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1987, 2–5; see also L. Tom Perry, in Conference Report, Apr. 1984, 104–8; or *Ensign*, May 1984, 78–80; M. Russell Ballard, “Missionary Couples,” *Ensign*, June 1988, 8–12; Robert D. Hales, in Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 31–34; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 25–27.
3. See “Serving as Couple Missionaries,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1997, 15.
4. See Luke 22:32.
5. Concerns pertaining to a mission may be considered in four categories:
 - (1) Finances: Any expenses over and beyond what would have been needed at home may be subsidized by children, friends, quorums, or by other members of the family.
 - (2) Fear: Mature missionaries need not fear tracting or learning a new language. Much can be contributed by using talents already acquired. Missionaries can venture into another language situation knowing that they will learn what they need to know without demanding fluency of themselves. They will learn some of their mission language and find joy in using each new expression.
 - (3) Fitness: While a risk-free environment cannot be guaranteed either at home or in the mission field, appropriate provisions can be made for proper diet and exercise. Routine needs for physical care can generally be met in the mission field. In the event of an emergency, evacuation, if advisable, is possible.
- (4) Families: Children and grandchildren of senior missionaries will be blessed because of their service. To a missionary the Lord provided this promise: “Behold, you have had many afflictions because of your family; nevertheless, I will bless you and your family, yea, your little ones; and the day cometh that they will believe and know the truth and be one with you in my church” (D&C 31:2). As those “little ones” pray for their missionary parents, they will be drawn toward the Lord as well as to parents or grandparents.
6. Personal letter, dated June 29, 2004.
7. Personal letter, received June 28, 2004.
8. Personal letter, received July 1, 2004.
9. Letter addressed to Elder Dallin H. Oaks from Dr. Brent and Carol Petersen, dated June 27, 2004.
10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1925, 10.
11. “To the Bishops of the Church,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 19, 2004, 27; see also “Excerpts from Recent Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1996, 72.
12. Categories include leadership and member work; family history and temple service; medical, humanitarian, and welfare services; working at visitors’ centers, for public affairs, on an area or mission office staff, with finance and records, with physical facilities, for the Church Educational System, with the Perpetual Education Fund, or in support of other educational endeavors. Other opportunities are available to suit the unique abilities possessed by prospective missionaries. See Giles H. Florence Jr., “So Many Kinds of Missions,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1990, 6–11.
13. For details regarding qualification and preparation for senior missionaries, see

- David B. Haight, "Couple Missionaries—'A Wonderful Resource,'" *Ensign*, Feb. 1996, 6–12; Vaughn J. Featherstone, "Couple Missionaries: 'Too Wonderful for Me,'" *Ensign*, Sept. 1998, 14–17; "There Is Work for Us to Do," *Ensign*, Oct. 1993, 36–41; "The Impact of Couple Missionaries," *Ensign*, Apr. 2003, 60–63; John L. Hart, "Working Miracles in Mission Field," *Church News*, Dec. 22, 1990, 3, 7.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 4:2–3; italics added.
 15. Doctrine and Covenants 4:5.
 16. Additional information can be found on the Church Web site www.lds.org under "Service Opportunities for Senior Missionaries" (click on "Other Resources" on the home page, then on "Church-Service Missionary Opportunities").
 17. See Bible Dictionary, "Gospels," 682–83.
 18. 3 Nephi 27:13–14.
 19. 3 Nephi 27:21.
 20. See Doctrine and Covenants 33:6–12; 39:6.
 21. Doctrine and Covenants 107:23.
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- The choir sang "Still, Still with Thee."
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President Hinckley

The choir has just sung "Still, Still with Thee."

It will now be my pleasure to address you. Following my remarks, the choir will sing "Come, Ye Thankful People." Elder Spencer V. Jones of the Seventy will then offer the benediction.

The concluding session of this conference will begin at 2:00 this afternoon.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Reflections on Sister Hinckley's passing

My brethren and sisters, at the outset, if you will bear with me, I wish to exercise a personal privilege. Six months ago, at the close of our conference, I stated that my beloved companion of 67 years was seriously ill. She passed away two days later. It was April 6, a significant day to all of us of this Church. I wish to thank publicly the dedicated doctors and wonderful nurses who attended her during her final illness.

My children and I were at her bedside as she slipped peacefully into eternity. As I held her hand and saw mortal life drain from her fingers, I confess I was overcome. Before I married her, she had been the girl of my dreams, to use the words of a song then popular. She was my dear companion for more than two-thirds of a century, my equal before the Lord, really my superior.

And now in my old age, she has again become the girl of my dreams.

Immediately following her passing there was a tremendous outpouring of love from across the world. Great quantities of beautiful floral offerings were sent. Large contributions were made in her name to the Perpetual Education Fund and her academic chair at Brigham Young University. There were literally hundreds of letters. We have boxes filled with them from many we know and from very many we do not know. They all express admiration for her and sympathy and love for us whom she left behind.

We regret that we have been unable to respond individually to these many expressions. So I now take this occasion to thank you every one for your great kindness toward us. Thank you so very, very much, and please excuse our failure to reply. The task was beyond our capacity, but your ex-

pressions have shed an aura of comfort in our time of grief.

I am grateful to be able to say that in our long life together I cannot remember a serious quarrel. Small differences occasionally, yes, but nothing of a serious nature. I believe our marriage has been as idyllic as anyone's could possibly be.

I recognize that many of you are similarly blessed, and I compliment you most warmly, for when all is said and done there is no association richer than the companionship of husband and wife, and nothing more portentous for good or evil than the unending consequences of marriage.

I see those consequences constantly. I see both beauty and tragedy. And so I have chosen to say a few words today on the women in our lives.

Eve's creation was the grand summation

I begin with the Creation of the world.

We read in the book of Genesis and in the book of Moses of that great, singular, and remarkable undertaking. The Almighty was the architect of that creation. Under His direction it was executed by His Beloved Son, the Great Jehovah, who was assisted by Michael, the archangel.

There came first the forming of heaven and earth, to be followed by the separation of the light from the darkness. The waters were removed from the land. Then came vegetation, followed by the animals. There followed the crowning creation of man. Genesis records that "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

But the process was not complete.

"For Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

"And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman" (Genesis 2:20-23).

And so Eve became God's final creation, the grand summation of all of the marvelous work that had gone before.

Great women in the scriptures

Notwithstanding this preeminence given the creation of woman, she has so frequently through the ages been relegated to a secondary position. She has been put down. She has been denigrated. She has been enslaved. She has been abused. And yet some few of the greatest characters of scripture have been women of integrity, accomplishment, and faith.

We have Esther, Naomi, and Ruth of the Old Testament. We have Sariah of the Book of Mormon. We have Mary, the very mother of the Redeemer of the world. We have her as the chosen of God, described by Nephi as "a virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins" (1 Nephi 11:15).

She it was who carried the child Jesus into Egypt to save His life from the wrath of Herod. She it was who nurtured Him in His boyhood and young manhood. She stood before Him when His pain-wracked body hung upon the cross on Calvary's hill. In His suffering He said to her, "Woman, behold thy son!" And to His disciple in a plea that he care for her, He said, "Behold thy mother!" (John 19:26-27).

Crossing through His life we have Mary and Martha, and Mary of Magdala. She it was who came to the tomb that first Easter morning. And to her, a woman, He first appeared as the resurrected Lord. Why is it that even though Jesus placed woman in a position of preeminence, so many men who profess His name fail to do so?

Duality of the sexes is God's design

In His grand design, when God first created man, He created a duality of the

sexes. The ennobling expression of that duality is found in marriage. One individual is complementary to the other. As Paul stated, "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:11).

There is no other arrangement that meets the divine purposes of the Almighty. Man and woman are His creations. Their duality is His design. Their complementary relationships and functions are fundamental to His purposes. One is incomplete without the other.

I recognize that we have many wonderful women among us who do not have the opportunity of marriage. But they too make such a tremendous contribution. They serve the Church faithfully and ably. They teach in the organizations. They stand as officers.

I witnessed a very interesting thing the other day. The General Authorities were in a meeting, and the presidency of the Relief Society were there with us. These able women stood in our council room and shared with us principles of welfare and of helping those who are in distress. Our stature as officers of this Church was not diminished by what they did. Our capacities to serve were increased.

Do not demean women

There are some men who, in a spirit of arrogance, think they are superior to women. They do not seem to realize that they would not exist but for the mother who gave them birth. When they assert their superiority, they demean her. It has been said, "Man can not degrade woman without himself falling into degradation; he can not elevate her without at the same time elevating himself" (Alexander Walker, in *Elbert Hubbard's Scrap Book* [1923], 204).

How very true that is. We see the bitter fruit of that degradation all about us. Divorce is one of its results. This evil runs

rampant through our society. It is the outcome of disrespect for one's marriage partner. It manifests itself in neglect, in criticism, in abuse, in abandonment. We in the Church are not immune from it.

Jesus declared, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6).

The word *man* is used in the generic sense, but the fact is that it is predominantly men who bring about the conditions that lead to divorce.

Solution to the problem of divorce

After dealing with hundreds of divorce situations through the years, I am satisfied that the application of a single practice would do more than all else to solve this grievous problem.

If every husband and every wife would constantly do whatever might be possible to ensure the comfort and happiness of his or her companion, there would be very little, if any, divorce. Argument would never be heard. Accusations would never be leveled. Angry explosions would not occur. Rather, love and concern would replace abuse and meanness.

There was a popular song we sang many years ago, the lyrics of which said:

I want to be happy,
But I won't be happy
Till I make you happy, too.
[Irving Caesar, "I Want to Be Happy"
(1924)]

How true this is.

Achieving harmony and peace at home

Every woman is a daughter of God. You cannot offend her without offending Him. I plead with the men of this Church to look for and nurture the divinity that lies within their companions. To the degree that happens, there will be harmony, peace, enrichment of family life, nurturing love.

Well did President McKay remind us that “no other success [in life] can compensate for failure in the home” (quoted from J. E. McCulloch, *Home: The Savior of Civilization* [1924], 42; in Conference Report, Apr. 1935, 116).

Likewise, the truth of which President Lee reminded us: “The [greatest] work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own home” (“Maintain Your Place as a Woman,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1972, 51).

The cure for most marital troubles does not lie in divorce. It lies in repentance and forgiveness, in expressions of kindness and concern. It is to be found in application of the Golden Rule.

It is a scene of great beauty when a young man and a young woman join hands at the altar in a covenant before God that they will honor and love one another. Then how dismal the picture when a few months later, or a few years later, there are offensive remarks, mean and cutting words, raised voices, bitter accusations.

It need not be, my dear brothers and sisters. We can rise above these mean and beggarly elements in our lives (see Galatians 4:9). We can look for and recognize the divine nature in one another, which comes to us as children of our Father in Heaven. We can live together in the God-given pattern of marriage in accomplishing that of which we are capable if we will exercise discipline of self and refrain from trying to discipline our companion.

“You have always given me wings to fly”

The women in our lives are creatures endowed with particular qualities, divine qualities, which cause them to reach out in kindness and with love to those about them. We can encourage that outreach if we will give them opportunity to give expression to the talents and impulses that lie within them. In our old age my beloved companion said to me quietly one eve-

ning, “You have always given me wings to fly, and I have loved you for it.”

I once knew a man who has since passed on but who insisted on making all of the decisions for his wife and children. They could not buy a pair of shoes without him. They could not take a piano lesson. They could not serve in the Church without his consent. I have since witnessed the outcome of that attitude, and that outcome is not good.

My father never hesitated to compliment my mother. We children knew that he loved her because of the way he treated her. He deferred to her. And I shall ever be profoundly grateful for his example. Many of you have been blessed likewise.

We are all necessary in God’s plan

Now I might go on, but it is not necessary. I wish only to give emphasis to the great, salient truth that we are all children of God, both sons and daughters, brothers and sisters.

As a father, do I love my daughters less than I love my sons? No. If I am guilty of any imbalance, it is in favor of my girls. I have said that when a man gets old, he had better have daughters about him. They are so kind and good and thoughtful. I think I can say that my sons are able and wise. My daughters are clever and kind. And “my cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:5) because of this.

Women are such a necessary part of the plan of happiness which our Heavenly Father has outlined for us. That plan cannot operate without them.

Show gratitude for women

Brethren, there is too much of unhappiness in the world. There is too much of misery and heartache and heartbreak. There are too many tears shed by grieving wives and daughters. There is too much negligence and abuse and unkindness.

God has given us the priesthood, and that priesthood cannot be exercised, “only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile” (D&C 121:41–42).

How thankful I am, how thankful we all must be, for the women in our lives. God bless them. May His great love distill upon them and crown them with luster and beauty, grace and faith. And may His

Spirit distill upon us as men and lead us ever to hold them in respect, in gratitude, giving encouragement, strength, nurture, and love, which is the very essence of the gospel of our Redeemer and Lord. For this I humbly pray, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “Come, Ye Thankful People.”

Elder Spencer V. Jones offered the benediction.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 174th Semiannual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 3, 2004. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Bonnie Goodliffe and Linda Margetts were the organists.

President Monson opened the meeting with the following remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 174th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, the Internet, or satellite transmission.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction

of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Bonnie Goodliffe and Linda Margetts at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing “High on the Mountain Top.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Val R. Christensen of the Seventy.

The choir sang “High on the Mountain Top.”

Elder Val R. Christensen offered the invocation.

The choir sang “Adam-ondi-Ahman.”

President Monson

The choir just sang “Adam-ondi-Ahman.”

We will now be pleased to hear from President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Sister Elaine S. Dalton, second counselor in the Young Women general presidency. Elder Richard J. Maynes of the Seventy will then address us.

President Boyd K. Packer

I join in welcoming Elders Uchtdorf and Bednar to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. By comparison with the rest of us, they are very young men. I was young when I was called. President Harold B. Lee prophesied, “You will get over it.”

I also welcome Elder Robert C. Oaks as one of the Presidents of the Seventy. After an illustrious career in the military, in the air force, he retired as a four-star general. That retirement was interrupted by a call to the Second Quorum of the Seventy, and after associating with the greatest military commanders and political leaders in the world, he and Gloria found themselves in Africa, where they served for three years among the humblest members of the Church, of whom I will speak.

An ordinary man remembered forever

There is a message for Latter-day Saints in a seldom quoted revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1838. “I remember my servant Oliver Granger; behold, verily I say unto him that his name shall be had in sacred remembrance from generation to generation, forever and ever, saith the Lord” (D&C 117:12).

Oliver Granger was a very ordinary man. He was mostly blind, having “lost his sight by cold and exposure” (*History of the Church*, 4:408). The First Presidency described him as “a man of the most strict integrity and moral virtue; and in fine, to be a man of God” (*History of the Church*, 3:350).

When the Saints were driven from Kirtland, Ohio, in a scene that would be repeated in Independence, in Far West, and in Nauvoo, Oliver was left behind to sell their properties for what little he could. There was not much chance that he could succeed. And, really, he did not succeed!

But the Lord said, “Let him contend earnestly for the redemption of the First

Presidency of my Church, saith the Lord; and when he falls he shall rise again, for his sacrifice shall be more sacred unto me than his increase, saith the Lord” (D&C 117:13).

What did Oliver Granger do that his name should be held in sacred remembrance? Nothing much, really. It was not so much what he did as what he was.

When we honor Oliver, much, perhaps even most, of the honor should go to Lydia Dibble Granger, his wife.

Oliver and Lydia finally left Kirtland to join the Saints in Far West, Missouri. They had gone but a few miles from Kirtland when they were turned back by a mob. Only later did they join the Saints at Nauvoo.

Oliver died at age 47, leaving Lydia to look after their children.

The Lord accepts our best efforts

The Lord did not expect Oliver to be perfect, perhaps not even to succeed. “When he falls he shall rise again, for his sacrifice shall be more sacred unto me than his increase, saith the Lord” (D&C 117:13).

We cannot always expect to succeed, but we should try the best we can.

“For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts” (D&C 137:9).

The Lord said to the Church:

“When I give a commandment to any of the sons of men to do a work unto my name, and those sons of men go with all their might and with all they have to perform that work, and cease not their diligence, and their enemies come upon them and hinder them from performing that work, behold, it behooveth me to require that work no more at the hands of those sons of men, but to accept of their offerings. . . .

“... This I make an example unto you, for your consolation concerning all those who have been commanded to do a work and have been hindered by the hands of their enemies, and by oppression, saith the Lord your God” (D&C 124:49, 53; see also Mosiah 4:27).

The few in Kirtland are now millions of ordinary Latter-day Saints across the world. They speak a multitude of languages but unite in faith and understanding through the language of the Spirit.

These faithful members make and keep their covenants and strive to be worthy to enter the temple. They believe the prophecies and sustain their ward and branch leaders.

Like Oliver, they sustain the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and accept what the Lord said: “If my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of [these men] whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, they shall not be moved out of their place” (D&C 124:45).

Lord uses the weak, makes them strong

In the revelation given as a preface for the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord explained who would do His work. Listen carefully as I read that revelation, and think of the trust that the Lord has in us:

“Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments;

“And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets—

“The *weak things* of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh.”

The next verse provides for the priesthood to be conferred upon ordinary, worthy men and boys:

“That every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; . . .

“That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the *weak and the simple* unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers.

“Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their *weakness*, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.

“And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known;

“And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed;

“And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent;

“And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time” (D&C 1:17–20, 23–28; italics added).

When we fall, we shall rise again

Now another generation of youth comes forward. We see a strength in them beyond what we have seen before. Drinking and drugs and moral mischief are not a part of their lives. They band together in study of the gospel, in socials, and in service.

They are not perfect—not yet. They are doing the best they can, and they are stronger than the generations that came before.

The Lord told Oliver Granger, “When [they fall, they] shall rise again, for [their] sacrifice shall be more sacred unto me than [their] increase” (D&C 117:13).

Some worry endlessly over missions that were missed, or marriages that did not turn out, or babies that did not arrive, or children that seem lost, or dreams unful-

filled, or because age limits what they can do. I do not think it pleases the Lord when we worry because we think we never do enough or that what we do is never good enough.

Some needlessly carry a heavy burden of guilt which could be removed through confession and repentance.

The Lord did not say of Oliver, “*If he falls,*” but “*When he falls he shall rise again*” (D&C 117:13; italics added).

Great power in ordinary members

Some years ago in the Philippines we arrived early for a conference. Sitting on the curb were a father and mother and four small children dressed in their Sunday best. They had come several hours on a bus and were having the first meal of the day. Each of them was eating a cob of cold, boiled corn. The cost of the bus to Manila probably came out of their food budget.

As I watched that family, my heart overflowed with emotion. *There* is the Church. *There* is the power. *There* is the future. As with families in many lands, they pay their tithing, sustain their leaders, and do their best to serve.

For more than 40 years, my wife and I have traveled over the earth. We know members of the Church in perhaps a hundred countries. We have felt the power in their simple faith. Their individual testimonies and their sacrifice have had a profound effect on us.

I do not like to receive honors. Compliments always bother me because the great work of moving the gospel forward has in the past, does now, and will in the future depend upon ordinary members.

My wife and I do not expect reward for ourselves greater than will come to our own children or to our parents. We do not press nor do we really want our children to set great prominence and visibility in the world or even in the Church as their goal in life. That has so very little to do

with the worth of the soul. They will fulfill our dreams if they live the gospel and raise their children in faith.

Like John, “[We] have no greater joy than to hear that [our] children walk in truth” (3 John 1:4).

Great strength of ordinary missionaries

Some years ago, as president of the New England Mission, I left Fredericton, New Brunswick. It was 40 degrees below zero. As the plane taxied away from that small terminal, I saw two young elders standing outside, waving good-bye. I thought, “Foolish boys. Why do they not go inside where it’s warm?”

Suddenly there came over me a powerful prompting, a revelation: There in these two ordinary young missionaries stands the priesthood of Almighty God. I leaned back, content to leave the missionary work for that entire province of Canada in their hands. It was a lesson I have never forgotten.

Eight weeks ago Elder William Walker of the Seventy and I held a zone conference in Naha for 44 missionaries on the island of Okinawa. President Mills of the Japan Fukuoka Mission was prevented from attending by an approaching ferocious typhoon. The young zone leaders conducted that meeting with as much inspiration and dignity as their mission president might have done. We left the next morning in gale-force winds, content to leave the missionaries in their care.

Church leaders from many nations

Recently in Osaka, Japan, Elders Russell Ballard and Henry Eyring of the Twelve and I, together with President David Sorensen and others of the Seventy, met with 21 mission presidents and 26 Area Authority Seventies. There were among the Area Authority Seventies Elder Subandriyo from Jakarta, Indonesia; Elder Chu-Jen Chia from Beijing, China;

Elder Remus G. Villarete of the Philippines; Elder Won Yong Ko from Korea; and 22 others—only two Americans among them. It was a uniting of nations, tongues, and people. None of them are paid. They all serve freely, grateful to be called to the work.

We reorganized stakes in Okazaki, Sapporo, and Osaka, Japan. All three of the new stake presidents and an incredible number of the leaders had joined the Church as teenagers. Most of them had lost their fathers in the war.

Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi of the Seventy is one of that generation.

The calamities that the Lord foresaw now come upon an unrepentant world. At once, generation after generation of youth come forward. They are given in marriage. They keep the covenants made in the house of the Lord. They have children and do not let society set limits upon family life.

“The least of these”

Today we fulfill the prophecy “that [Oliver Granger’s] name shall be had in sacred remembrance from generation to generation, forever and ever” (D&C 117:12). He was not a great man in terms

of the world. Nevertheless, the Lord said, “Let no man despise my servant Oliver Granger, but let the blessings . . . be on him forever and ever” (D&C 117:15).

Let no one underestimate the power of faith in the ordinary Latter-day Saints. Remember the Lord said, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40).

He promised that “the Holy Ghost shall be [their] constant companion, and [their] scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and [their] dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto [them] forever and ever” (D&C 121:46).

Nothing! No power can stop the progress of the Lord’s work.

“How long can rolling waters remain impure? What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints” (D&C 121:33).

Of this I bear an apostolic witness, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Sister Elaine S. Dalton

We did this for you

A little over a year ago, my husband and I visited Nauvoo. As we walked through the Old Pioneer Cemetery searching for the grave of an ancestor, Zina Baker Huntington, I was touched by the peaceful solitude and spirit I felt. I walked through the trees and read the names on the grave-stones, many of them children and families. I wept as my heart was turned to our forefathers, many of whom had joined the Church and come to Nauvoo. In my mind

I asked many questions: Why did they leave their comfortable homes and families? Why did they suffer persecution, sickness, even death? Why did they sacrifice all that they had to come to this place and build a temple? They hardly had shelter, and yet they were building a temple! Why did they do it? And when the temple was nearly completed, how could they leave it behind? As I sat silently contemplating this scene, the answer came forcefully yet softly to my mind and heart: “We did this for you.”

Those words, “We did this for you,” reminded me that our ancestors, along with many other faithful Saints, sacrificed everything because of their testimonies and faith in Jesus Christ. They knew that the gospel had been restored to the earth once more and that they were led by a prophet of God. They knew that the Book of Mormon was true and understood its message and witness. They knew that through the restoration of priesthood keys, families could be sealed together for eternity through holy priesthood ordinances available only in a temple. They knew that temple work was the key to the salvation and exaltation of the human family. They knew the importance of this work, and they were willing to give all that they had in order to provide a house acceptable to the Lord wherein this holy work could be performed. They sacrificed everything so that past and future generations would have access to the eternal blessings of the temple.

Hearts of children turn to their fathers

Prior to coming to Nauvoo, the Saints sacrificed greatly to build the first temple of this dispensation in Kirtland, Ohio. It was there that the Lord appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Three other heavenly messengers also appeared there. One of these was Elijah the prophet, who restored, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, keys pertaining to the restoration of the priesthood and the “great work to be done in the temples of the Lord.”¹ This happened in accordance with the promise that is recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants wherein the Lord said:

“Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet. . . .

“And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

“If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.”²

The early Saints understood what this scripture meant, and on that beautiful morning in the old cemetery in Nauvoo, I understood also.

Enter temples to fulfill the promises

How can the promises made to the fathers be planted in the hearts of the children? How can the hearts of the children be turned to their fathers? This can happen only when we understand our identity and roles in this work and remain worthy and prepared to enter the temple and act on behalf of those who have gone before.

Brigham Young said: “We have a work to do just as important in its sphere as the Savior’s work was in its sphere. . . . We are now called upon to do ours; which is to be the greatest work man ever performed on the earth.”³

In the vision of the redemption of the dead given to President Joseph F. Smith, he saw many of the noble and great prophets who had been on the earth prior to the Savior’s coming. He also saw the Prophet Joseph Smith; Hyrum Smith, his father; and “*other choice spirits* who were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work.”⁴ Who were those other choice spirits? Our generation was somewhere there among those “noble and great” leaders, prepared in the world of spirits to be on the earth at this time! The scriptures tell us that “even before they were born, they, *with many others*, received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men.”⁵ The labor we were prepared and reserved to perform includes “the building of the temples and the performance of ordinances therein for the redemption of the dead.”⁶

Temples are spreading over the earth

Brigham Young foresaw the time in which we are now living. He said:

“To accomplish this work there will have to be not only one temple but thousands of them, and thousands and tens of thousands of men and women will go into those temples and officiate for people who have lived as far back as the Lord shall reveal.”⁷

When I was young, my grandfather Martin taught me that in the latter days, temples would literally dot the earth. At the time my grandfather expressed this thought to me, I could hardly imagine it. But I was raised with this knowledge and feeling in my heart. Recently I looked on the Church’s Web site under “temples,” and I could plainly see that temples, designated by red dots, are starting to spread over much of the earth.⁸

Our beloved prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, has said, “We are determined . . . to take the temples to the people and afford them every opportunity for the very precious blessings that come of temple worship.”⁹ Our prophet knows that it is difficult to do temple work if we are not near a temple. This is our day, and temple work is the work that we have been prepared to do. It is a work for every generation, including and especially the youth of the Church.

Importance of youth doing temple work

In order to perform this great work, we must be worthy. No wonder we are surrounded on every side with things designed to discourage, distract, or disqualify us. We must keep our focus, and we must remember that the temple is the reason for everything we do in the Church.

Youth programs such as Personal Progress and Duty to God encourage our youth to be worthy to attend the temple. These programs are designed to help youth make and keep commitments, thus

preparing them to make and keep covenants. They also encourage youth to participate in journal writing, family history, and performing baptisms for their ancestors.

The *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet teaches doctrine and principles that, if understood and lived, will help youth be worthy to attend the temple. These programs are powerful tools to be used by youth, parents, and leaders. They help youth prepare to be worthy to attend the temple. And our youth do not have to wait until a mission or marriage to visit the temple. They can have temple experiences beginning at age 12 by doing baptisms and confirmations, and these can continue throughout their teen and adult years.

Youth feel blessings of temple work

Great blessings will literally “be poured out upon the heads” of those who are endowed in the temples, and a portion of these blessings will come to our youth as they live worthily to participate in the house of the Lord.¹⁰

The Salt Lake Temple baptistry is a thrilling place to be on Saturday mornings! I was there early one morning to be baptized for some of my ancestors. As I sat waiting on the bench in the baptismal area, I noticed that the young woman on my left was reading her patriarchal blessing. The girl on my right was reading her scriptures. I asked her if she had come here with a group. Her reply was, “No, I come with my friend every Saturday. It makes my whole week go better.”

These young women, along with many other young men and women, know a grand secret—the temple blesses not only our families’ and ancestors’ lives, but also our own. We are promised that those who are endowed in the temple will go forth from that holy house “armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them.”¹¹

These are great blessings and promises. What youth does not desire to prepare to receive these blessings in order to navigate in today's ever-darkening world?

A great work for youth to do in temples

When President Faust talked to the young men in the priesthood session last October, he called on them to lead out and become a part of temple and family history work. He said:

"I encourage you . . . to begin to unlock the knowledge of who you really are by learning more about your forebears. . . .

" . . . You can easily access a vast collection of family history records using the Internet on your home computer or at your nearest family history center. . . .

" . . . Temple work is essential . . . because 'we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect.'"¹²

The youth have been prepared "for such a time as this."¹³ They are intelligent and bright. They are proficient on computers and the Internet. They are a great untapped resource for good in the world! They have been reserved for these latter days, and they have a great work to do. And not only do they have a great work to do there, but the temple will also be a refuge for them that will protect them from worldly pressures and influences.

An army of youth in the temple

As I contemplate President Faust's words, I can visualize an army of righteous youth prepared and worthy to attend the temple. I can see families sealed together for eternity. I can see youth who understand what it means to be "saviours . . . on mount Zion."¹⁴ I can see youth whose hearts are turned to their fathers.¹⁵ And I can envision youth growing up in such

a way that they will come forth from the temples filled with strength to resist worldly pressures.¹⁶ I can see a generation of youth who will "stand . . . in holy places, and be not moved."¹⁷

Zina Baker Huntington, along with so many other faithful Saints, sacrificed *everything* in order that we might have the blessings of the restored gospel. It is my prayer that we might understand our role in this great work and remain worthy to enter His holy temples. I know that if we will do this, the joyful day will come when we shall meet our ancestors once again and be able to say to them, "*We did this for you.*" In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 138:48; see also Doctrine and Covenants 27:9; 110:14–16; 128:17; 138:47.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–3.
3. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 406.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 138:53; italics added.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:55–56; italics added.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 138:54.
7. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 394.
8. See www.lds.org; see also "Temples throughout the World," *Friend*, July 2002, 36–37.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 69; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 50.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:9–10.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 109:22.
12. In Conference Report, Oct. 2003, 57–58; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 53–54; see also Doctrine and Covenants 128:18.
13. Esther 4:14.
14. Obadiah 1:21.
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–3.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:22.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 87:8.

Elder Richard J. Maynes

A perilous time for the Nephites

From ancient days to modern days, true disciples of Jesus Christ have understood the importance of making and keeping covenants with the Lord.

In approximately 64 B.C., the Nephite nation was living in extremely perilous times. Because of iniquity, dissensions, and intrigue, they found themselves in the most dangerous circumstances (see Alma 53:9). The government teetered on the brink of collapse. The war with the Lamanites had been ongoing for years. Nephite dissidents were leaving to join forces with the enemy. Many Nephite cities had been attacked and captured.

In the midst of this dangerous and chaotic situation, righteous men were sought after to lead the Nephite armies—men like Moroni and Helaman. These Nephite leaders understood that their nation's ability to defend itself was in direct proportion to their obedience to the Lord. They constantly struggled to motivate the population to remember the Lord and keep His commandments.

Stripling warriors enter into a covenant

At this very critical point in time, after many Nephite cities had been lost and the balance of power seemed to be shifting toward the Lamanites, a miraculous thing took place. A group of people, once Lamanites, now known as Ammonites because they were converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ through the teachings of Ammon, came forward desirous to take up arms in the defense of their newly inherited land, country, and way of life (see Alma 53:13).

The fathers of these Ammonite families had previously made an oath to the Lord never to take up arms again. Helaman, the Nephite prophet, counseled these men to keep their promise to the Lord (see

Alma 53:15). Mormon relates what transpired after Helaman shared that counsel:

“But behold, it came to pass they had many sons, who had not entered into a covenant that they would not take their weapons of war to defend themselves against their enemies; therefore they did assemble themselves together at this time, as many as were able to take up arms, and they called themselves Nephites.

“And they entered into a covenant to fight for the liberty of the Nephites, yea, to protect the land unto the laying down of their lives; yea, even they covenanted that they never would give up their liberty. . . .

“Now behold, there were two thousand of those young men, who entered into this covenant and took their weapons of war to defend their country. . . .

“And they were all young men, and they were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted.

“Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him.

“And now it came to pass that Helaman did march at the head of his two thousand stripling soldiers, to the support of the people” (Alma 53:16–18, 20–22).

Faith and obedience of stripling warriors

Helaman and his 2,000 stripling soldiers fought valiantly to protect their families and their liberty. Their entrance onto the field of battle changed the course of the war. Momentum swung back in favor of the Nephites.

In a letter written to Moroni, Helaman describes the faith and courage these young men exhibited:

“And now I say unto you, my beloved brother Moroni, that never had I seen so great courage, nay, not amongst all the Nephites. . . .

“Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:45, 47).

Brothers and sisters, “they did not doubt, [and] God [did] deliver them.” In their first great battle, not one of the 2,000 was slain. After the battle, 60 more young Ammonite men joined the small army. Helaman tells us, “They did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them” (Alma 57:21).

The second battle in which this small army was engaged was more intense than the first. In its aftermath Helaman writes:

“And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty, who had fainted because of the loss of blood; nevertheless, according to the goodness of God, . . . there was not one soul of them who did perish. . . .

“And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, . . . and we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith” (Alma 57:25–26).

Making and keeping sacred covenants

Helaman and his young stripling soldiers understood the importance of making covenants with the Lord. They were also recipients of the blessings that come to those who faithfully keep their covenants.

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have also taken upon ourselves sacred obligations. We have done this in the waters of baptism and in the temples of the Lord. We

call these obligations *covenants*. Covenants are promises we make to the Lord. They are extremely sacred in nature. The most important thing we can do in this life is to keep the promises or covenants we have made with the Lord. When we keep our promises to the Lord, He allows us to progress spiritually.

A covenant-keeping family

During the past two years, Sister Maynes and I have been assigned to serve in the Philippines. We have come across many examples of Filipino families and individuals who understand and keep the covenants they have made with the Lord. Let me share with you an experience that we have had with one of these families.

A few months ago I was assigned to preside at the Talisay Philippines Stake conference. During the Sunday general session, I began my talk by thanking the congregation for their reverence. While speaking, I looked down to my left and saw a very large family sitting a couple of rows back from the front of the chapel. I was impressed to point them out and use them as an example of a family who understood and lived the principle of reverence. The parents were sitting there surrounded by many, many reverent children.

Upon the completion of the meeting, we had the wonderful opportunity to meet the Abasanta family. The more I learned about them, the more I was impressed with the fact that they truly understood what it meant to keep covenants and live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brother Lani and Sister Irene Abasanta joined the Church 22 years ago. Together they have had 17 children. Among the 17 children is one set of triplets. We all know that raising a family is not an easy task anywhere in the world, and the Philippines is no exception. The Abasanta family is a living example that it can be done, and it can be done in the right way.

The successes they have enjoyed raising their children in the Church are made manifest in many ways. A family of 19 sitting reverently through Church meetings is just one example.

Another example is illustrated by how they work hard and how they work together to meet their everyday financial needs. Brother Abasanta works as an electrician. Sister Abasanta, with the help of her daughters, makes and sells jewelry out of their home. Together they have succeeded in providing the necessities of life for their family.

Even more important than their example in supporting their large family financially is how they teach their children to live the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their regular family home evenings play an essential part in the teaching of their family. Referring to their family home evenings, Brother Abasanta said, "First we discuss any problems we might have in the family and how we can become more united; then there is a spiritual thought or lesson; then we play games."

At a recent family home evening, Brother Abasanta used the *Liahona* magazine as a tool to help him teach his children not to spend so much time watching television but instead to use that time doing something of greater worth, like homework or reading the scriptures. Over the years during family home evenings, the children have been taught to practice being reverent. Because their children have been taught to be reverent in their home, it is easier for them to demonstrate reverence at church on Sunday.

Another example of living the gospel and keeping their covenants is the priority they have given in teaching their children the importance of paying an honest and full tithing. Brother Abasanta stated: "We teach our children that the food we have is a direct result of paying tithing. When our kids have their own work, we make sure to tell them that they need to pay their

tithing. It's hard to provide for so many children, but when I pay my tithing faithfully and honestly, it's not hard at all. We just trust in the Lord 100 percent that if we pay an honest tithing, we'll be able to eat daily."

Remember that I mentioned that Brother and Sister Abasanta have 17 children. Now let me tell you about the triplets. They happen to be all boys. They happen to be 19 years old. Their names are Ammon, Omni, and Omner. Yes, you guessed it. All three are serving the Lord as faithful and hard-working full-time missionaries. Ammon is serving in the Philippines Baguio Mission, Omni is serving in the Philippines Davao Mission, and Omner is serving in the Philippines Manila Mission.

Now I do not want you to get the impression that the Abasanta family is perfect. None of us are perfect. However, by trying their best to live the commandments and keep their covenants, the Abasanta family is able to enjoy the blessings of the Lord in their lives.

Earn the Lord's trust by doing His will

Brothers and sisters, we are all looking forward to the day when we can return home to our Heavenly Father. In order to qualify for exaltation in the celestial kingdom, we must gain the trust of the Lord here on earth. We gain the trust of the Lord through earning it, and that is accomplished through our actual performance in living His gospel and keeping our covenants. In other words, we earn the trust of the Lord by doing His will.

Remember when the Lord warned Joseph Smith regarding those who "draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Joseph Smith—History 1:19).

Remember the admonition of James: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

Actions truly do speak louder than words. In fact, actions mean much more to the Lord than words. The Lord declared in the Doctrine and Covenants, “If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments” (D&C 42:29).

Faithfully keep our promises to the Lord

Helaman and his young stripling soldiers are an ancient illustration of the blessings that come to those who faithfully keep their promises to the Lord. The Abasanta family is a modern-day example of a family doing their best to keep their covenants and live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have made promises to the Lord. We have promised to take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments (see D&C 20:77). Faithful members of the Church keep those promises.

It is my prayer today that we might all recommit ourselves to do everything in our power to earn the trust of the Lord by doing His will, by living His gospel, and by keeping our covenants, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Thank you, President Packer, Sister Dalton, and Elder Maynes.

The choir and congregation will now sing “Now Let Us Rejoice.” At the conclusion of the singing, Elder H. Bryan Richards of the Seventy will address us, after which we shall hear from Bishop H. David Burton, Presiding Bishop of the Church. He will be followed by Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang
“Now Let Us Rejoice.”

Elder H. Bryan Richards

Remember the teachings of your father

On January 10, 1945, I received my patriarchal blessing from my father’s mission president, John M. Knight. It was the only time I ever met him. After he pronounced my lineage, his next words—the first words of counsel in my blessing—were “Remember the teachings of your father.” That counsel has been and continues to be a great blessing in my life.

Not long after receiving my blessing, I came home from Sunday School. Our lesson had been about Joseph Smith’s First Vision, and I was wondering if it was really true. My father was leaving for a Church meeting. I stopped him and asked, “Dad, how do we really know that Joseph Smith

had that vision?” My father put his arm around me, and we sat on the sofa in our living room. There he shared with me the Prophet Joseph’s account, and my father bore his own testimony of its truthfulness. That experience with my father burns in my heart today. Since then I have never doubted the Prophet Joseph’s account of his First Vision.

Over my teenage years, I remember vividly my father’s regular study of the Book of Mormon. His love of the Book of Mormon and counsel to me to study and ponder over it were the beginning of a journey with that sacred record that is the foundation of my personal testimony today. It is a journey each of us must take.

Learning to love the Book of Mormon

Others along the way helped me on my personal journey with the Book of Mormon. My first seminary teacher shared her experience as a young missionary wanting to know if the Book of Mormon was true. She told of reading King Benjamin's speech and in her mind's eye seeing King Benjamin standing on his tower and hearing him deliver that great sermon. Her testimony, accompanied by the Spirit, left a deep impression upon my mind.

I remember the summer before entering college having the chance to go to Monument Valley to work on the first high school built there for the Navajo people. As I was about to leave home, my father asked me if I was going to take my Book of Mormon. I hadn't thought to, but I paid heed to his question. I remember lying in my bunk late at night at the construction site and feeling the spirit and power of the Book of Mormon.

I remember as a young missionary in the Great Lakes Mission coming to that great knowledge and absolute testimony that the Book of Mormon was another witness of another nation that Jesus is the Christ and that this Church is true. From those experiences there burns in my heart today that divine witness of the message of the Book of Mormon, of Christ as our Savior and Redeemer, and of the Restoration of His Church in these latter days.

The Book of Mormon changes lives

I want to share with you some of the great blessings the Book of Mormon can bring to us. The Book of Mormon can and does change lives. After our son John received his mission call to Japan, he said to me, "Dad, before I enter the Missionary Training Center, I am going to read the Book of Mormon twice." I said to John, "That is quite a demanding goal." I felt his resolve and made the decision to follow

his example. I began reading early each morning. A few days later when I came home from work, John said to me, "I caught up with you today." I asked, "What do you mean?" His response: "I caught up to where you are in the Book of Mormon. You left it open on your desk." The next morning after my reading, I felt inspired to turn about 150 pages past where I was. I left my Book of Mormon open where he could not miss it and went to work. After a meeting that morning, I checked my voice mail. The very first message said, "Yeah, sure, Dad!"

Why this story? As I watched my son read from the Book of Mormon, I began to see a special change in his life as he prepared to enter the Missionary Training Center. That experience has anchored my son to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I recall an experience with a zone leader in England who came to me during the lunch break at zone conference. He said, "We are teaching a lady who is blind and nearly deaf. She wants to know if the Book of Mormon is true. What shall we do?" I did not have an answer at that moment, but I said, "I will let you know after our conference." During the afternoon session I had the distinct impression come as to how to help her. After the meeting I said to the zone leader, "Have this sister hold her copy of the Book of Mormon and turn its pages very slowly. When she has done this, have her ask if it is true." Though she could not read nor hear the words, she felt the spirit and power of the Book of Mormon, and it changed her life.

Three invitations to feel the book's power

I have come to love the message of the Book of Mormon. To help each of you feel the power and spirit of the Book of Mormon and, I hope, to help you along your journey, may I give to you three invitations?

Learn what the stripling warriors were taught

First, I'd like to refer to the story of Helaman and his 2,060 stripling warriors:

"And as the remainder of our army were about to give way before the Lamanites, behold, those two thousand and sixty were firm and undaunted.

"Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them; and I did remember the words which they said unto me that their mothers had taught them. . . .

"And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army. . . . And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe" (Alma 57:20–21, 26).

If I were to ask you who it was that taught these great young warriors, all of you would know the answer—their mothers. My first invitation to you is to find out what their mothers taught them.

Learn of the word and plant it in your heart

Second, we are familiar with Alma's teaching on faith, challenging the people:

"Behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you. . . .

"Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed. . . .

"Therefore, if a seed groweth it is good, but if it groweth not, behold it is not good, therefore it is cast away" (Alma 32:27–28, 32).

My second invitation to you is to discover specifically what the word, or seed, is and plant it in your heart. You will have to go to Alma, chapter 33 to find it. When you do, your faith will take on a whole new dimension.

Learn what Helaman taught, then teach it

Third, if you were going to teach your children three great truths that you would want them to remember, what would they be? Helaman asked his sons Lehi and Nephi to remember three great truths "that ye may do these things to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, . . . that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life" (Helaman 5:8). My third invitation to you is to find out what Helaman asked his sons to remember and then to teach those things to your children. I'll help you this much. Read and ponder Helaman, chapter 5.

Why opposition to the Book of Mormon?

Why is it that tremendous opposition was directed at the Book of Mormon even before its translation and has continued even until today? In this regard, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

"What is it about some words on a printed page—all of which are clean and uplifting and pertain to historical and doctrinal matters—that arouses such violent antagonisms? . . . Why do men oppose the Book of Mormon? For precisely the same reason they oppose Joseph Smith" (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* [1985], 459, 461).

The reason Satan desperately fights the Book of Mormon is found in the last two paragraphs of the introduction to that book:

"We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, to ponder in their hearts the message it contains, and then to ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ if the book is true. Those who

pursue this course and ask in faith will gain a testimony of its truth and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost. (See Moroni 10:3–5.)”

Now listen carefully:

“Those who gain this divine witness from the Holy Spirit will also come to know by the same power that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, that Joseph Smith is his revelator and prophet in these last days, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord’s kingdom once again established on the earth, preparatory to the second coming of the Messiah.”

The reason Satan has fought and continues to fight against the Book of Mormon is because of those three divine truths. He does not want us to come to that sacred knowledge.

Bishop H. David Burton

Sister Burton and I were interviewed prior to our marriage by Elder Richards’s father. We know of what Elder Richards has spoken in this session of conference.

At a recent stake conference, a young lady came up to me at the conclusion. As we were shaking hands, she said, “Bishop, you could improve your general conference talks by smiling.” I wanted to tell her about fear and smiling, but I didn’t have time. But I’ll try and hope for the best.

A desire for more

At the conclusion of every general conference, I experience a longing for more—more of the serenity of the occasion, more of the companionship of the Spirit, more of the nurturing that has brightened and blessed my soul.

The current conventional wisdom is that more is better and less is usually undesirable. For some, the pursuit to acquire more of this world’s goods and services

A witness of Jesus Christ

“Remember the teachings of your father.” I will ever be grateful for my father. Though he has been gone for nearly 30 years, his teachings continue to live in my heart. I am grateful that for a season of my life I have the privilege of being an especial witness of Christ. Because of the Book of Mormon, its message, and the divine witness I have received, I can leave you my witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God the Father in the flesh. He finished the work of the infinite and eternal Atonement. Christ will come again and rule over us as Lord of lords and King of kings. Of Him and of this work, I leave you my solemn witness, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

has become a passion. For others, more of this world’s wealth is necessary just to sustain life or raise living standards to a minimum level. The unbridled desire for more often has tragic consequences. For example, President Boyd K. Packer reminded us:

“We could be like a father determined to provide everything for his family. He devotes every energy to that end and succeeds; only then does he discover that what they needed most—to be together as a family—has been neglected. And he reaps sorrow in place of contentment” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 28; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 22).

Struggles to avoid the pitfalls of “more”

Parents who have been successful in acquiring more often have a difficult time saying no to the demands of overindulged children. Their children run the risk of not learning important values like hard work,

delayed gratification, honesty, and compassion. Affluent parents can and do raise well-adjusted, loving, and value-centered children, but the struggle to set limits, make do with less, and avoid the pitfalls of “more, more, more” has never been more difficult. It is hard to say no to more when you can afford to say yes.

Parents are rightfully anxious about the future. It is difficult to say no to more sports equipment, electronics, lessons, clothes, team participation, et cetera, when parents believe more will help children thrive in an increasingly competitive world. Young people seem to want more, partly because there is infinitely more to catch their eye. The American Academy of Pediatrics estimated that American children see more than 40,000 commercials a year.

Fewer and fewer parents ask their children to do chores around the house because they think they are already overwhelmed by social and academic pressures. But children who are devoid of responsibilities risk never learning that every individual can be of service and that life has meaning beyond their own happiness.

When “more” is too much

In her book *My Grandfather's Blessings*, Dr. Rachel Remen tells of becoming good friends with a couple and their young son, Kenny. When she visited, she would sit on the floor with Kenny and play with his two Hot Wheels cars. Sometimes she would have the one without a fender and he had the one with a door missing and sometimes vice versa. He loved those cars!

When a gas station chain offered a Hot Wheels car with every fill-up, she recruited the staff at her clinic to go to that particular station and collect the cars. As soon as she had all of the models, she wrapped them in a big box to take to Kenny. She hoped she wouldn't offend his

parents, who lived quite meagerly. Kenny excitedly opened the big box and took out the cars one by one. They filled the windowsills and even extended to the floor. What a collection! Later, while visiting the family, Rachel noticed Kenny just staring out the window. When she asked Kenny, “What's the matter? Don't you like your new cars?” he looked down sheepishly. “I'm sorry, Rachel. I guess I just don't know how to love so many Hot Wheels.” (See “Owning” [2000], 60–61.)

We have all heard children, after they have opened many Christmas or birthday gifts, say, “Isn't there more?” With all the challenges present in this “more generation,” there remains divine counsel to teach our children “to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost, . . . to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord, . . . [and to] observe the Sabbath day [and] keep it holy” (D&C 68:25, 28–29).

The meaning of *more* and *less* is not always crystal clear. There are times when less is in reality more and times when more can be less. For instance, less pursuit of materialism may enable more family togetherness. More indulgence of children may result in less understanding of life's important values.

“More holiness give me”

Some aspects of life can be significantly enhanced by the notion that more is better. The sacred hymn “More Holiness Give Me” (*Hymns*, no. 131) brings to our remembrance the virtues worthy of more of our attention. Jesus Himself described what it requires to be “more, Savior, like thee.” He said, “I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48).

Meekness is vital to becoming more Christlike. Without it one cannot develop other important virtues. Mormon indi-

cated, "None is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart" (Moroni 7:44). Acquiring meekness is a process. We are asked to "take up [the] cross daily" (Luke 9:23). Our lifting should not be an occasional exercise. More meekness does not translate to weakness, but "it is the presentation of self in a posture of *kindness* and *gentleness*. It reflects certitude, strength, serenity; it reflects a healthy self-esteem and a genuine self-control" (Neal A. Maxwell, "Meekly Drenched in Destiny," in *Brigham Young University 1982-83 Fireside and Devotional Speeches* [1983], 2). More meekness will allow us to be tutored by the Spirit.

The virtues expressed in "More Holiness Give Me" fall into several groups. Some are personal goals, like more holiness give me; more strivings within; more faith, gratitude, and purity; more fit for the kingdom; more purpose in prayer; and more trust in the Lord. Others center on adversity. They include patience in suffering, meekness in trial, praise for relief, strength to overcome, freedom from earth stains, and longing for home. The rest firmly anchor us to our Savior: more sense of His care; more pride in His glory; more hope in His word; more joy in His service; more tears for His sorrows; more pain at His grief; more blessed and holy; and more, Savior, like Thee. More of these virtues is better. Less is not desirable.

An elder's "strivings within"

Many experience joy in His service by teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and its Restoration and testifying of the Savior and His life, ministry, and Atonement.

A missionary district leader was wondering why Elder Parker, who was about to conclude his mission, was successful in spite of his inability to memorize the discussions. To understand, he teamed with Elder Parker to give a discussion. Elder Parker's presentation was so disorganized

that by the end of the formal lesson, the district leader was confused and surmised that the family being taught felt the same way.

It was then that "Elder Parker leaned forward and put his hand on the arm of the family's father. He then looked him straight in the eyes, told him how much he loved him and his family, and bore one of the most humble and powerful testimonies that the district leader had ever heard. By the time he finished, every member of the family, including the father, and both elders had tears running down their cheeks. Next, Elder Parker taught the father how to pray, and they all knelt down while the father prayed that they might receive testimonies of their own and thanked Heavenly Father for the great love that he felt. Two weeks later the whole family was baptized."

Later, Elder Parker apologized to his district leader for not knowing the discussions. He said he struggled with memorization, even though he spent hours each day working on it. He said that he knelt in prayer before teaching each family and asked Heavenly Father to bless him when he bore his testimony so that people would feel his love and the Spirit and know they were being taught the truth (see Allan K. Burgess and Max H. Molgard, "That Is the Worst Lesson I've Ever Heard!" in *Sunshine for the Latter-day Saint Soul* [1998], 181-83).

What can we glean from this simple story? Do you think Elder Parker felt the need to strive more to learn the discussions? Is it possible Elder Parker came to understand the need to offer prayers with a purpose? Do you suppose his prayers were laced with pleas to garner more strength to overcome? Might the inability to memorize have brought patience in suffering and meekness in trial? Did he demonstrate great faith in the Savior and trust in the Lord? Most certainly he did!

Volunteers feel “more joy in His service”

Over the last seven weeks, four major hurricanes have come ashore in Florida and along the Gulf of Mexico. Most nations of the Caribbean have experienced extensive devastation. Food, clothing, and shelter are in short supply. Large masses of debris clog roads and yards. Local infrastructure has been destroyed or needs major repair.

Last week I was in Tallahassee, Florida, and received many expressions of appreciation for the aid furnished by the Church during these emergencies. Florida Governor Bush, Lieutenant Governor Toni Jennings, partners like the Red Cross and Salvation Army, along with federal and state emergency personnel expressed gratitude that I pass on to you who performed the labor to ease the burden of cleanup and to those who have contributed to the Church's Humanitarian Fund. Thank you. I trust you have felt more joy and more used in His service.

Following the pattern of previous weekends at different locations, over 2,000 volunteers from all over the southeastern United States gathered in Pensacola, Florida, last weekend to help with the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan. They rolled out their sleeping bags on meetinghouse floors, in other churches, and in members' homes. They responded to thousands of work orders to assist wherever they were needed. Missionaries participated by covering the

roof of the local Methodist church with the ever-present blue tarps. First responders, the firemen and the policemen, expressed appreciation that the Latter-day Saints had been assigned to help their families in their absence.

All of this was accomplished at the same time Hurricane Jeanne was coming ashore after causing much distress in Haiti and other Caribbean locations. Thanks again to those of you who give of your means and those whose hands have lightened the load of so many. I salute you for your desire to be more blessed and holy and more like the Savior. This weekend 2,500 will be helping with the aftermath of Hurricane Jeanne.

Seek “more” of eternal virtues

In discussing our various longings for more, I'm not suggesting we adopt Scrooge as a role model for good parenting. I am suggesting that it is important for families and individuals to aggressively seek more of the virtues which go beyond this mortal life. A prayerful, conservative approach is the key to successfully living in an affluent society and building the qualities that come from waiting, sharing, saving, working hard, and making do with what we have. May we be blessed with the desire and the ability to understand when more is really less and when more is better. In the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

Press on despite difficulties, sorrows

I have lived long enough to experience firsthand many of the challenges of life. I have known exceptional people who have endured severe trials, while others, at least on the surface, seem to have lived charmed lives.

Often those who struggle with adversity ask the question “Why did this happen to me?” They spend sleepless nights wondering why they feel so lonely, sick, discouraged, oppressed, or brokenhearted.

The question “Why me?” can be a difficult one to answer and often leads to frustration and despair. There is a better

question to ask ourselves. That question is “What could I learn from this experience?”

The way we answer that question may determine the quality of our lives not only on this earth but also in the eternities to come. Though our trials are diverse, there is one thing the Lord expects of us no matter our difficulties and sorrows: He expects us to press on.

The doctrine of enduring to the end

The gospel of Jesus Christ includes enduring to the end as one of its bedrock doctrines. Jesus taught, “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”¹ And “if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.”² Some think of enduring to the end as simply suffering through challenges. But it is so much more than that—it is the process of coming unto Christ and being perfected in Him.

The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi taught: “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.”³

Enduring to the end is the doctrine of continuing on the path leading to eternal life after one has entered into the path through faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost. Enduring to the end requires our whole heart—or, as the Book of Mormon prophet Amaleki taught, we must “come unto him, and offer [our] whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth [we] will be saved.”⁴

Enduring to the end means that we have planted our lives firmly on gospel soil, staying in the mainstream of the Church, humbly serving our fellowmen,

living Christlike lives, and keeping our covenants. Those who endure are balanced, consistent, humble, constantly improving, and without guile. Their testimonies are not based on worldly reasons—they are based on truth, knowledge, experience, and the Spirit.

The parable of the sower

The Lord Jesus Christ uses the simple parable of the sower to teach the doctrine of enduring to the end.

“The sower soweth the word.

“And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

“And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

“And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.

“And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,

“And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

“And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”⁵

This parable describes the types of soil onto which seeds of truth are sown and nourished. Each type of soil represents our degree of commitment and ability to endure.

The first type of soil, that of the “way side,” represents those who hear the gospel but never give the truth a chance to take root.

The second type of soil, “stony ground,” represents those in the Church who, at the first sign of sacrifice or trial, run away offended, not willing to pay the price.

The third type of soil, “sown among thorns,” represents some members of the Church who are distracted and obsessed by the cares, riches, and lusts of the world.

Finally, those on “good ground” are those members of the Church whose lives reflect their discipleship to the Master, whose roots go deep into gospel soil, and thereby produce abundant fruit.

Three obstacles to endurance

In the parable of the sower, the Savior identifies three obstacles to endurance which can canker our souls and stop our eternal progress.

The first obstacle of endurance, “the cares of the world,” is essentially pride.⁶ Pride rears its ugly head in so many ways that are destructive. For example, intellectual pride is very prevalent in our day. Some people exalt themselves above God and His anointed servants because of their learning and scholarly achievements. We must never allow our intellect to take priority over our spirit. Our intellect can feed our spirit and our spirit can feed our intellect, but if we allow our intellect to take precedence over our spirit, we will stumble, find fault, and may even lose our testimonies.

Knowledge is very important and one of the few things that accompanies us into the next life.⁷ We should always be learning. However, we must be careful not to set aside our faith in the process because faith actually enhances our ability to learn.

The second obstacle to endurance is “the deceitfulness of riches.” We should end our fixation on wealth. It is only a means to an end, which end should ultimately be the building up of the kingdom of God. I feel that some are so concerned

about the type of car they drive, the expensive clothes they wear, or the size of their house in comparison to others that they lose sight of the weightier matters.⁸ We must be careful in our daily lives that we do not allow the things of this world to take precedence over spiritual things.

The third obstacle to endurance mentioned by the Savior is “the lusts of other [things].” The plague of pornography is swirling about us as never before. Pornography brings a vicious wake of immorality, broken homes, and broken lives. Pornography will sap spiritual strength to endure. Pornography is much like quicksand. You can become so easily trapped and overcome as soon as you step into it that you do not realize the severe danger. Most likely you will need assistance to get out of the quicksand of pornography. But how much better it is never to step into it. I plead with you to be careful and cautious.

Enduring to the end is a principle for all

A few weeks before President Heber J. Grant passed away, one of the Brethren went to visit him in his home. Before the man left, President Grant prayed, “O God, bless me that I shall not lose my testimony and keep faithful to the end!”⁹ Can you imagine President Grant, one of the great prophets of the Restoration, the President of the Church for nearly 27 years, praying that he would keep faithful to the end?

No one is immune from Satan’s influence and temptations. Do not be so proud to think that you are beyond the adversary’s influence. Be watchful that you do not fall prey to his deceptions. Stay close to the Lord through daily scripture study and daily prayer. We cannot afford to sit back and take our salvation for granted. We must be anxiously engaged our whole lives.¹⁰ These words of President Brigham Young motivate and remind us that we can never give up the fight to endure:

“The men and women, who desire to obtain seats in the celestial kingdom, will find that they must battle every day [for this sacred goal].”¹¹

Strength to endure

I know that there are many who suffer heartbreak, loneliness, pain, and setback. These experiences are a necessary part of the human experience. However, please do not lose hope in the Savior and His love for you. It is constant. He promised that He would not leave us comfortless.¹²

When we face challenges in our lives, we are comforted by the words of the Lord in the 58th section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation.

“For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand.”¹³

Warren Johnson presses on despite trials

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we must press on and eventually become more like the Lord in the process. We all know those who have faced great trials in life and have endured faithfully. One inspiring example is from an early Saint of the 19th century, Warren M. Johnson. He was assigned by Church leaders to operate Lee’s Ferry, an important crossing over the Colorado River in the desert of northern Arizona. Brother Johnson endured great challenges yet remained faithful his entire life. Listen to Brother Johnson explain his family tragedy in a letter to President Wilford Woodruff:

“In May 1891 a family . . . came [to Lee’s Ferry] from Richfield Utah, where they . . . spent the winter visiting friends. At Panguitch they buried a child, . . . with-

out [cleaning] the wagon or themselves. . . . They came to our house, and remained overnight, mingling with my little children. . . .

“We knew nothing of the nature of the disease [diphtheria], but had faith in God, as we were here on a very hard mission, and had tried as hard as we knew how to obey the [commandments] . . . that our children would be spared. But alas, in four and a half days [the oldest boy died] in my arms. Two more were taken down with the disease and we fasted and prayed as much as we thought it wisdom as we had many duties to perform here. We fasted [for] twenty-four hours and once I fasted [for] forty hours, but to no avail, for both my little girls died also. About a week after their death my fifteen year old daughter Melinda was [also] stricken down and we did all we could for her but she [soon] followed the others. . . . Three of my dear girls and one boy [have] been taken from us, and the end is not yet. My oldest girl nineteen years old is now prostrate [from] the disease, and we are fasting and praying in her behalf today. . . . I would ask for your faith and prayers in our behalf however. What have we done that the Lord has left us, and what can we do to gain his favor again[?]”

A short time later, Brother Johnson wrote a local leader and friend, expressing his faith to press on:

“It is the hardest trial of my life, but I set out for salvation and am determined that . . . through the help of Heavenly Father that I [would] hold fast to the iron rod no matter what troubles [came] upon me. I have not slackened in the performance of my duties, and hope and trust that I shall have the faith and prayers of my brethren, that I can live so as to receive the blessings.”¹⁴

Three attributes to foster endurance

Though heavy trials of Brother Johnson can help us to face our own challenges,

may I suggest three attributes to foster endurance in our day.

First, testimony. Testimony gives us the eternal perspective necessary to see past the trials or challenges we will inevitably face. Remember what Heber C. Kimball prophesied:

“The time will come when no man nor woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to be guided by the light within himself. . . .

“ . . . If you don’t have it you will not stand; therefore seek for the testimony of Jesus and cleave to it, that when the trying time comes you may not stumble and fall.”¹⁵

Second, humility. Humility is the recognition and attitude that one must rely on the Lord’s assistance to make it through this life. We cannot endure to the end on our own strength. Without Him, we are nothing.¹⁶

Third, repentance. The glorious gift of repentance allows us to return to the path with a new heart, giving us the strength to endure on the path leading to eternal life. The sacrament thus becomes a key component of our endurance in this life. The sacrament provides a precious weekly opportunity to renew our baptismal covenants and repent and evaluate our progress toward exaltation.

Have the faith and courage to press on

We are sons and daughters of the Eternal God, with the potential to be joint-heirs with Christ.¹⁷ Knowing who we are, we should never give up the goal of achieving our eternal destiny.

I testify that in the eternities, as we look back upon our little span of existence here on this earth, we will lift our voices and rejoice that, in spite of the difficulties we encountered, we had the wisdom, the faith, and the courage to endure and press on.

That we may do so this day and forever is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Matthew 24:13.
2. John 8:31.
3. 2 Nephi 31:20.
4. Omni 1:26.
5. Mark 4:14–20.
6. See Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 3–7; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 4–7.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:18–19.
8. See Matthew 23:23.
9. Quoted by John Longden, in Conference Report, Oct. 1958, 70.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:27.
11. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 392.
12. See John 14:18.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 58:3–4.
14. Quoted in Jay A. Parry and others, eds., *Best-Loved Stories of the LDS People*, 3 vols. (1997–2000), 3:107–8.
15. In Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (1945), 450.
16. See John 15:5.
17. See Romans 8:17.

President Monson

Thank you, Elder Richards, Bishop Burton, and Elder Wirthlin, for those inspiring messages.

As we conclude the conference, we express appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir, the Primary Choir from the stakes of West Jordan, Utah—we still see those smiling faces, taught to sing—and the men of the Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square. We likewise thank their conductors and organists for the beautiful and inspiring music. We also extend our gratitude to all who have participated in any way in these proceedings.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following Pres-

ident Hinckley's remarks, the choir will sing "God Be with You Till We Meet Again." The benediction will then be of-

fered by Elder Quentin S. Cook of the Seventy, and this conference will be adjourned for six months.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Leave conference with stronger faith

We have experienced another great conference. What remarkable meetings these are. What a great purpose they serve. We gather together in a spirit of worship and with a desire to learn. We renew our relationships as members of this large family of Latter-day Saints who live in many lands, who speak a variety of languages, who come out of difficult cultures, who even look different. And we recognize that we are all one, each a son or daughter of our Father in Heaven.

In a few minutes this great Conference Center in Salt Lake City will be emptied. The lights will be dimmed and the doors locked. It will be so with thousands of other halls across this broad world. We shall return to our homes, greatly enriched I hope. Our faith will have been strengthened, our resolve fortified. Where we have felt defeated and beaten, I hope that a new courage has come into our lives. Where we have been wayward and indifferent, I hope that a spirit of repentance has taken hold of us. Where we have been unkind or mean and selfish, I hope that we have determined that we will change. All who walk in faith will have had that faith strengthened.

Today is Monday in the Far East. Tomorrow is Monday in the Western Hemisphere and in Europe. It is a time that we have designated as family home evening. On that occasion I hope that fathers and mothers will gather their children about them and talk of some of the things they have heard in this conference. I would wish they might even write down some of

these things, reflect on them, and remember them.

Temple attendance sanctifies us

Now as we conclude I wish to remind you of another matter. I would hope that we might go to the house of the Lord a little more frequently. As I indicated at the opening session, we have done all that we know how to do to bring temples closer to our people. There are still many who have to travel long distances. I hope they will continue to make that effort until such time as a temple is justified in their midst.

Most of our temples could be much busier than they are. In this noisy, bustling, competitive world, what a privilege it is to have a sacred house where we may experience the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of the Lord. The element of selfishness crowds in upon us constantly. We need to overcome it, and there is no better way than to go to the house of the Lord and there serve in a vicarious relationship in behalf of those who are beyond the veil of death. What a remarkable thing this is. In most cases we do not know those for whom we work. We expect no thanks. We have no assurance that they will accept that which we offer. But we go, and in that process we attain to a state that comes of no other effort. We literally become saviors on Mount Zion. What does this mean? Just as our Redeemer gave His life as a vicarious sacrifice for all men, and in so doing became our Savior, even so we, in a small measure, when we engage in proxy work in the temple, become as

saviors to those on the other side who have no means of advancing unless something is done in their behalf by those on earth.

And so, my brothers and sisters, I encourage you to take greater advantage of this blessed privilege. It will refine your natures. It will peel off the selfish shell in which most of us live. It will literally bring a sanctifying element into our lives and make us better men and better women.

Every temple, large or small, has its beautiful celestial room. This room was created to represent the celestial kingdom. When the Mesa Arizona Temple was extensively renovated some years ago and was opened for public tours, one visitor described the celestial room as God's living room. So it well might be. It is our privilege, unique and exclusive, while dressed in white, to sit at the conclusion of our ordinance work in the beautiful celestial room and ponder, meditate, and silently pray.

Here we can reflect on the great goodness of the Lord to us. Here we can reflect on the great plan of happiness which our Father has outlined for His children. And

so I urge you, my brothers and sisters, to do it while you have strength to do it. I know that when you get old, it becomes extremely difficult to get up and down. But what a great blessing it is.

Expression of love and testimony

Now, my brothers and sisters, I express to you again my love. May heaven smile upon you. This work is true. Never doubt it. God, our Eternal Father, lives. Jesus is our Redeemer, our Lord, the Son of the living God. Joseph was a prophet, the Book of Mormon is of divine origin, and this is God's holy work in the earth. I leave you my witness, my love, my blessing as we separate to go to our homes. May God be with you till we meet again is my humble prayer, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "God Be with You Till We Meet Again."

Elder Quentin S. Cook offered the benediction.

SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE MUSIC

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for the Saturday morning, Sunday morning, and Sunday afternoon sessions. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir. John Longhurst, Clay Christiansen, Richard Elliott, Linda Margetts, and Bonnie Goodliffe were the organists.

Music for the Saturday afternoon session was provided by a Primary choir from stakes in West Jordan, Utah. Jane Knudsen Poulsen directed the choir, and Linda Margetts was the organist.

Music for the priesthood session was provided by the men of the Tabernacle

Choir, joined by members of the Orchestra at Temple Square. Mack Wilberg and Craig Jessop directed the choir, and Richard Elliott and John Longhurst were the organists.

Throughout the conference sessions, prelude, postlude, and interlude music and accompaniments on the organ were played by John Longhurst, Clay Christiansen, Richard Elliott, Linda Margetts, and Bonnie Goodliffe.

Brook P. Hales
Clerk of the Conference

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